Mindful Life or Mindful Lives?

Exploring why the Buddhist belief in rebirth should be taken seriously by mindfulness practitioners

Submitted by Jacob Andrew Lucas, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy* in Philosophy, June 2018.

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Abstract

This thesis will explore whether those interested in Buddhist practices such as mindfulness but who approach such practices from a broadly secular perspective can be offered reasons to take rebirth seriously as an afterlife possibility. It will begin by exploring some of the history of mindfulness and its adoption from Buddhism to show how foundational cosmological elements such as rebirth have been side-lined as part of a wider movement to bring Buddhism in line with modernist, particularly scientific, discourses.

The thesis will investigate the philosophical principles behind the Buddhist multi-life perspective in order to see whether arguments could be rallied in defence of it. This will involve focussing specifically on the argument in defence of rebirth offered by Dharmakīrti and show how its premises draw from philosophical principles adopted by the earliest Buddhist philosophical systems. Dharmakīrti's argument will be examined within the context of contemporary philosophy of consciousness where philosophers such as Evan Thompson and Galen Strawson have challenged the view that consciousness could arise from entirely unconscious factors. This challenge aligns with a key premise of Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth as well as Buddhist Abhidharma principles. Arguments against the emergence of consciousness from unconscious factors strengthen the case for claiming that consciousness cannot simply appear at the beginning of life and disappear at death.

Whilst supporting Strawson's arguments, the thesis will ultimately reject his claim that an individual consciousness could be constructed from, and ultimately collapse into, multiple consciousnesses. From here it will be argued that conscious experiences arise as part of an unbroken stream that can neither arise from nor collapse into rudimentary factors that are devoid of the distinctive characteristics of consciousness. The argument will conclude by suggesting that the stream of consciousness involves an inseparable capacity for retention and recall. This capacity provides the possibility for the sort of psychological continuity between lives that, within traditional Buddhist cosmology, allows an ordinary being to cultivate the extraordinary personal qualities of a Buddha.

Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements

I would like to say something here about the roots of this thesis. I began studying both western and Buddhist philosophy at the same time, albeit in different ways. Within months of starting a course in A-Level Philosophy I began practising and studying Buddhism informally with the Saraswati Buddhist Group. These two types of study continued to run in parallel during my undergraduate years. Although my undergraduate philosophy programme was entirely based in the western tradition, I continually brought Buddhist insights and ideas to bear on what I was learning. In particular, when studying philosophy of mind and encountering the "hard problem" of how to explain the origins of consciousness, I considered it in the light of the traditional Buddhist claim that the mind-stream persists through countless lifetimes.

But despite the constant interplay of Buddhist and western philosophical perspectives in my own thinking, little of this cross-cultural dialogue found its way into my undergraduate work. Most of it took place in conversations with friends, family, fellow students, and fellow Buddhist practitioners. In the end it was not studying philosophy but rather working for a mental health charity and noticing the increasing use of Buddhist practices in clinical contexts that would ignite my desire to research the differences between western and Buddhist perspectives on the world.

However, my main goal in returning to university was to explore the extent to which the practice of mindfulness, even in secular contexts, retained something of the wisdom found in Buddhist teachings. My Masters dissertation, for example, asked whether there was a distinctly mindful way to do politics, which might spread with increased uptake of mindfulness practice. This was the direction that my PhD project was originally going to take.

And then I read Owen Flanagan's *The Bodhisattva's Brain: Buddhism Naturalized.*

Reading Flanagan's attempt to bring Buddhism into line with a naturalistic framework I was surprised by the degree of contempt that he showed for the

traditional Buddhist worldview. I had spent nearly a decade considering traditional Buddhist claims about rebirth in the light of scientific evidence and philosophical argument and had come to regard those claims as worth taking seriously. But here was someone rejecting those claims as if they were worthy of little more than light attention tinged with ridicule.

In response, I wanted to offer something of a counterweight to Flanagan's dismissal of traditional Buddhists as well-meaning but woolly-minded dabblers in 'wishful hocus pocus'.[1] I wished to present something of the Buddhist thinking that I had come to respect as a genuine challenge to materialist approaches to the mind and world. The following thesis is the result of this attempt to present the traditional Buddhist belief in rebirth as worthy of being seriously engaged with.

There are many people who I wish to thank. Firstly, my PhD supervisors (past and present), Dr. Joel Krueger, Prof. Rupert Gethin, and Dr. Nigel Pleasants, for all of their open-minded support, advice, and feedback. Without their balance of genuine interest and critical evaluation of my work, this thesis would not have been possible. I also thank the South West and Wales Doctoral Training Partnership, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, without whose financial support I would not have been able to embark on this project.

I owe a great deal to the teaching and guidance of a number of academics at the Universities of Exeter and Cardiff. At Cardiff University I wish to give particular thanks to my undergraduate tutor Dr. Peter Sedgwick for introducing me to the phenomenological tradition, whose work provides something of a bridge between western philosophy and Buddhist thought. At the University of Exeter I wish to give a specific thankyou to Dr. Edward Skidelsky for his friendliness and for hosting the Good Life reading group, which provided inspiration and encouragement to me when I was starting this project.

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[1] Owen Flanagan, *The Bodhisattva's Brain: Buddhism Naturalized*, MIT Press, 2011, p.3.

I have also benefited from the friendship and conversation of many others. In particular I thank Dr. George Carpenter, Dr. Lewis Coyne, Dr. Jack Griffiths, Jaanika Puusalu, Dr. Andrea Raimondi, and my fellow members of the Embodiment Research Cluster, without whose supportive and scintillating conversation this whole project would have not been even half as fun.

I also wish to thank those key teachers who set me off on this course. In particular I thank Andy Wistreich who, thirteen years ago, led a two-day retreat that gave me a deep, experiential introduction to Buddhist cosmology. That was, in many ways, the beginning of the journey that led to this project. But I would never have been at that retreat were it not for one of my greatest teachers: my dad, Andrew Lucas. I thank him for taking me along to this and many other retreats and meetings of the Saraswati Buddhist Group, and for all the great conversations we have had about the Buddhist worldview and practice that have enriched this thesis. Likewise I thank my mother, sister, and brother for all the support and conversations that got me to this point. I also offer special thanks to poet, peace activist, and Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, for the inspiration that he provides for practitioners around the world and for helping me to recognise that the existence of this thesis is dependent upon the existence of the entire cosmos.

Lastly, and in so many ways most importantly, I thank my wife Laura, whose love and the ability to provide either unfailing encouragement or much needed distraction at precisely the right times have held me steady throughout this journey.

Author's declaration

Minor elements of Chapters 3 and 4 have been published in 'Review of waking, dreaming, being: self and consciousness in neuroscience, meditation, and philosophy, by Evan Thompson', in *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences,* pp.759-764, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2017. This is in accordance with Chapter 11, Section 2.2, of the University of Exeter's Postgraduate Research Handbook.

1. Introduction

> The last thirty years have seen enormous growth in mindfulness based therapies derived from Buddhist meditation techniques. In January 2015 the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Mindfulness in the UK published an interim report, Mindful Nation UK, with recommendations on mindfulness in the areas of health, the workplace, education and the criminal justice system. The techniques of mindfulness, in both their traditional Buddhist forms and in their modern secular forms, aim to give us access to a perspective on our emotions and thoughts that is universally therapeutic, yet do modern secular techniques of mindfulness free mindfulness from the burden of its outmoded Buddhist cultural baggage or deprive it of the essential humanising vision that should be at its core?[1]

This abstract was for a panel discussion titled 'Buddhism, Mindfulness and Being Human', organised by the University of Bristol as part of the *InsideArts* Festival of Arts and Humanities, held on the 18th of November 2015. The panel was composed of David Leech, a philosopher of religion; Michael Houser, a psychiatric nurse; and Venerable Amaro Bhikkhu, a Buddhist monk. David Leech began the discussion by highlighting some of the issues facing mindfulness as a practice that originates within Buddhist meditation techniques but has been adopted and adapted for clinical use in psychological therapies and has become increasingly popular within the wider context of secular self-help techniques. For some, the sort of mindfulness practised in clinical and self-help contexts is becoming too heavily secularised; it is not "Buddhist enough", having lost its ethical emphasis. For others, mindfulness is still "too Buddhist", with its adoption being tantamount to an attempt to covertly convert vulnerable people to Buddhism.

As the discussion progressed it became clear that the secularisation of mindfulness does not render it ethically empty. We can reasonably assume that

[1] This quote is taken from the web page advertising the panel discussion 'Buddhism, mindfulness, and being human' available at http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/festival/events/2015/panel-discussion-buddhism-mindfulness-and-being-human.html (accessed 14th June 2018).

secular teachers and practitioners of mindfulness are not operating within a valueless vacuum that only Buddhist ethics can fill. Any practitioner, Buddhist or not, will be embedded within a culture or way of life that has a rich and complex ethical framework. Nor can we claim that secular ethics are incompatible with the Buddhist origins of mindfulness. It would be uncharitable to flatly deny that Buddhist and secular teachers and practitioners of mindfulness are alike in their intention to increase happiness and reduce suffering. And yet, while the sides of this debate were not defined by the outright presence or absence of an ethical approach, one could argue that the specific emphases and details of their respective approaches determined how they viewed mindfulness practice. In this way, a key issue was the fact that mindfulness is a technique with its origins in a distinctly Buddhist way of life. This way of life is not homogeneous; a quick glance at any book on the varieties of Buddhist culture and life will attest to that.

Nevertheless, there are some foundational features, some roots from which the variety of Buddhist cultures, practices and ways of life have grown. Foundational features include the four noble truths, the basic analysis of suffering, its causes, and its cessation, which structures the path of Buddhist practice. The fourth of these noble truths is the disclosure of eight intertwined practices that lead to liberation from suffering, of which the correct application of mindfulness (Pali: *sammā-sati,* Sanskrit: *samyak smṛti)* is one.[2] The Buddhist approach to mindfulness is rooted in its own analysis of suffering and its distinctive understanding of the path to lasting happiness.

Listening to the panellists, I realised that in discussing the question of how "Buddhist" mindfulness should be, when adapted for a secular context, they were fundamentally discussing how much it should remain structured and directed by those approaches to overcoming suffering and achieving happiness that are foundational to Buddhism. And yet, while they discussed this issue,

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[2] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Transformation and Healing: Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness*, Berkeley, Parallax Press, 2006, p.8.

there was one distinct feature of the foundational Buddhist approach, not only to mindfulness but to life in general, which was never mentioned let alone discussed. Where the discussion highlighted some of the differences between mindfulness as understood within Buddhist traditions and outside of them there was no mention of the fact that mindfulness and other techniques were originally practised within a temporal framework of multiple lifetimes.

The Buddhist vision of reality includes as one of its foundational features the cosmological assumption that every being is caught in a cycle of perpetuating rebirths. Insofar as a secular approach to mindfulness removes any reference to rebirth, it cannot approach suffering and liberation from suffering in the same way that Buddhists traditionally have. Foundational to the Buddhist analysis of suffering and its causes is the cycle of dependent origination (Sanskrit: *pratītyasamutpāda* Pali: *paṭiccasamuppāda*), a cycle of birth, death and, most importantly, rebirth.

But what does it mean to talk of foundational features of Buddhism? Given the diversity of Buddhist cultures throughout history we must be careful not to assume that Buddhism is a monolithic and historically static phenomenon. Buddhist ideas and practices have changed and developed throughout history and so do not give us an unmediated sense of what Buddhism is and what the Buddha taught. Particularly when it comes to the recent reception of Buddhist ideas and practices in the West, there has been a great deal of interpretation that has led to the manner in which they are presented and understood.

That said, I do wish to claim that one can meaningfully refer to traditional Buddhist beliefs, beliefs that are part of a shared Buddhist heritage. To do so I wish to draw on the work of Buddhist scholar Rupert Gethin.

1.1 The Foundations of Buddhism

In *The Foundations of Buddhism* Gethin points out that it is both fashionable and accurate to say that 'there is not one Buddhism but many Buddhisms'.[3] With this in mind he nonetheless confirms that there are 'fundamental ideas and practices that constitute something of a common heritage shared by the different traditions of Buddhism'.[4] These include the story of the Buddha Siddhārtha Gautama; a textual and scriptural tradition; the framework of the four noble truths; the monastic and lay ways of life; and, most importantly for our concerns, a cosmology based around karma and rebirth. The common heritage also includes the teachings on no self and interdependence; an ethical way of life leading from good conduct to meditation and understanding of the nature of reality; theoretical systems on this nature of reality; and the altruistic ideal to which this all leads.

To take this common heritage as providing the basic features of the traditional Buddhist perspective is not to claim that these constitute the essence of Buddhism. As Gethin points out, different Buddhists might talk about these features in different ways depending on their location and context. Nonetheless:

> [W]hatever the nature of the Buddhist terrain, one cannot dig much below the surface without coming across some trace of the patterns of thought and practice outlined here, even if at different times and in different places the constructions built on their foundations present their own distinctive and peculiar aspects.[5]

These patterns of thought and practice are, in Gethin's words, 'the foundations on which Buddhism rests.'[6]

In using the term 'traditional Buddhism', I am referring to the attitudes, values and practices that have historically framed the lives of Buddhists in countries such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Tibet, Bhutan and Vietnam and

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[3] Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, p.2.
[4] Ibid., p.3.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

continue to do so in increasingly diverse locations. According to this framework, the Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama, was an awakened being who taught that suffering arises due to a fundamental ignorance about the nature of reality. This ignorance takes the form of an assumption that there is an enduring, independently existing self. This assumption gives rise to attachment towards that which belongs to the self and aversion towards everything that threatens it. Motivated by ignorance, attachment and aversion we engage in activities (Sanskrit: *karma* Pali: *kamma*) that lead to being reborn again and again in lives of varying quality. In these future lives we could be a human, or a non-human animal, or we could be reborn in any one of a variety of heavenly or hellish realms. Only the realisation that all things are interdependent and impermanent can bring an end to the cycle of birth, sickness, decay, death and rebirth.

This foundational framework is the shared heritage common to all Buddhist traditions and by not touching on the key cosmological features that define this framework, the panel discussion could not get to the heart of what is at issue here. The core issue is whether one thinks that 'modern secular techniques of mindfulness free mindfulness from the burden of its outmoded Buddhist cultural baggage' or one thinks that they 'deprive it of the essential humanising vision that should be at its core'. Surely, I thought, a discussion of the essential humanising vision at the heart of Buddhist mindfulness practice must *at least mention* rebirth.

Without addressing the multi-life context in which mindfulness has traditionally been practised, one of the key distinctions between the secular modernist and traditional Buddhist practitioners of mindfulness remains untouched. This key distinction is *whether they consider traditional Buddhist cosmology, which includes rebirth, to be outmoded baggage or an essential feature of the Buddhist understanding of suffering and the path to happiness.* Insofar as we overlook this key distinction we risk presenting Buddhist cosmology as irrelevant to practices associated with the Buddhist path. This is a risk whether we are engaging in a panel discussion or any of the other aspects of the general conversation around Buddhism's relationship to modernity. If such discussions consistently overlook the multi-life perspective, the impression is given that

rebirth is ultimately irrelevant to the humanising vision at the heart of mindfulness practice.

Such an approach to the relationship between Buddhist cosmology and practice might become tempting given the fact that, over thirty years, a Buddhist meditation technique has been successfully adopted for use in clinical therapy. After all, Jon Kabat Zinn and others writing about mindfulness during the 1980s and 1990s *were* highly successful in adapting Buddhist practices to fit within the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) model introduced by Aaron T. Beck.[7] One might assume, given the success with which traditional Buddhist meditation techniques were adopted into psychotherapeutic practice, that the distinctive Buddhist cosmological framework is not particularly important when it comes to the successful practice of core techniques. This may well be at least partially true. The evidence strongly suggests that one can gain benefit from the practice of mindfulness without any familiarity with the traditional Buddhist framework.[8] This is not surprising given that both Buddhist tradition and modern psychology seem to be using mindfulness techniques in order to overcome the same phenomenon: suffering, conceived of as the various forms of mental and physical misery that we might experience. What is important to the successful adoption of mindfulness for clinical benefit is the compatibility between the overall interests and orientation of Buddhist and modern psychological traditions.

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[7] Jon Kabat-Zinn is strongly associated with the emergence of mindfulness-based therapies in the 1980s and 90s, having founded the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Programme in 1979. See Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living,* New York, Random House, 2005, p.xxix. See also Rupert Gethin, 'On some definitions of mindfulness', pp.263-279, in *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1, May 2011, p.268. And see also Melanie Fennell and Zindel Segal, 'Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy: culture clash or creative fusion?', *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* pp.125–142, Vol.12, No.1, 2011, pp.125-128.

[8] See, for example, J. Mark G. Williams and Jon Kabat-Zinn, 'Mindfulness: Diverse perspectives on its meaning, origins and applications at the intersection of science and dharma', *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* pp.1-18, Vol.12, No.1, 2011, pp.1-4.

Nevertheless, this essential compatibility need not go any deeper than the shared interest in suffering, its causes and its cessation. Such compatibility need not even mean that these different traditions share similar accounts of what suffering is at its deepest level and how best to overcome it. As one explores the analysis of suffering, its causes and its cessation found in most Buddhist traditions, one will eventually come across cosmological ideas that are simply not found in modern psychological approaches. These cosmological ideas are found because Buddhist practitioners have not traditionally considered suffering to be the problem of a single life. Within the foundational Buddhist framework suffering is understood to be a condition of existing in *saṃsāra*, the cycle of involuntary birth and death. To suffer, according to this understanding, is to be trapped by psychological tendencies that will pull one from life to life without end. Liberation from suffering comes once these tendencies are extinguished.

The differences between this approach to suffering and happiness when compared to modern psychological approaches are too numerous to list here. Needless to say the multi-life perspective gives Buddhism a distinct approach to what mindfulness practice amounts to.[9] Its distinct analysis of suffering includes very subtle analysis combined with a vast cosmic and temporal scale. For each practitioner, their path to happiness and their history of suffering takes place over multiple lifetimes in a variety of different types of body and world.

Therefore, when we discuss the 'essential humanising vision' of Buddhism we are discussing a vision with a high degree of breadth and complexity. The successful adoption of mindfulness does not rule out the possibility that something valuable and beneficial is lost when mindfulness practice is disconnected from a Buddhist cosmological framework.

[9] Ibid., p.33.

1.2 Bringing Rebirth into the Discussion

My aim in challenging the terms of the panel discussion on mindfulness is to highlight the undue absence of the traditional Buddhist cosmology from the wider discussion regarding Buddhism's relationship with modern secular culture. This absence unduly limits discussion regarding the relationship between the respective philosophical frameworks that ground Buddhist and modern secular culture. Discussions regarding secularism and Buddhism rarely entertain the possibility that the Buddhist cosmological framework, specifically its account of the afterlife, might be a serious alternative to the widespread assumption within secular culture that death results in annihilation. There are a great many avenues that we might explore and questions that we might ask about the possible influence that such a cosmological framework might have on ethical and political attitudes, self-understanding and self-help practices, as well as educational and clinical interventions. But these avenues will only be explored and questions asked if the Buddhist cosmological framework is taken seriously.

I aim to explore this framework in order to discover what arguments might be put forward to suggest that it be taken seriously by non-Buddhists. I am using non-Buddhist practitioners of mindfulness as my chief example because they represent a subset of non-Buddhists who may wish to engage with Buddhist tradition but who may find its cosmological ideas inaccessible. Ernest mindfulness practitioners steeped in a secular worldview are likely to have some basic respect for the tradition from which the technique originates whilst also requiring good reasons to take traditional ideas such as rebirth seriously. This allows me to imagine that they might be willing to engage with the philosophical ideas that ground Buddhist cosmology.

I will begin by exploring the marginalisation of the Buddhist cosmological framework within modern approaches to Buddhist practice in order to show how it is rooted in a rejection of the multi-life perspective traditionally adopted by Buddhist practitioners. I will suggest that, if we are to reject this cosmology, it should be because of weaknesses in the philosophical support for rebirth as an afterlife possibility not the result of disengaged scepticism or uncritical

adherence to modern western philosophical assumptions. Genuine engagement with Buddhist philosophy *as it relates to Buddhist cosmology* is required in order to determine whether cosmological features such as rebirth should be taken seriously.

1.3 Buddhist Modernism and Buddhist Cosmology

The process of peeling mindfulness away from other aspects of Buddhism did not begin with modern clinicians. The successful adaptation of mindfulness into a psychological therapy is due in part to a wider historical trend in which the Buddhist culture surrounding and permeating meditation techniques like mindfulness is stripped away. In *The Making of Buddhist Modernism,* David L. McMahan investigates how a distinctly modern form of Buddhism developed as traditional ideas and practices entered into dialogue with the narratives of scientific rationalism, romanticism and protestant Christianity. For the past one-hundred-and-fifty years, this dialogue has resulted in various forms of what McMahan calls Buddhist Modernism, interpretations of Buddhism that are to various degrees de-traditionalised, demythologised and psychologized.[10] McMahan describes the detraditionalization of religion as 'the shift of orientation from external to internal authority and the associated reorientation from institutional to privatized religion'.[11] He uses the term demythologization to describe 'the process of attempting to extract – or more accurately, to reconstruct – meaning that will be viable within the context of modern worldviews from teachings embedded in ancient worldviews.' A key aspect of this process is that 'elements that are incompatible with modernity are relegated to "myth" and shorn of literal truth-value.'[12] Such "mythical" elements are then psychologized, that is, reinterpreted as being purely psychological in nature.

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[10] David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp.36-87.
[11] Ibid., p.42.
[12] Ibid., p.46.

We can find another excellent investigation into the development of the division between 'mythical' and 'essential' Buddhism in Donald Lopez Jr's *Buddhism and Science.* Lopez shows how, at different times in the past one-hundred-and-fifty years, different Buddhist traditions have entered into dialogue with different aspects of the natural sciences and, in each case, the process of making a particular form of Buddhism compatible with the science of the day has required the elimination of features deemed essential by previous lay and monastic practitioners.[13]

Prior to McMahan's comprehensive investigation, Philip A. Mellor also recognised some of the same processes in his article 'Protestant Buddhism? The Cultural Translation of Buddhism in England'. For example, Mellor points out that the England-based organisation known at the time as the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order held the view that 'a Buddhist 'essence' can be distilled from the eastern cultures and traditions in which it has been located until the recent past'. Mellor notes that this view 'demonstrates certain continuities with Protestant perspectives' which, having 'combined with a post-Enlightenment scientific tradition', 'present religion as essentially a personal, private matter rather than an issue of culture.'[14] Here, what Mellor calls Protestant Buddhism involves the same process of detraditionalization as Buddhist Modernism.

It is as a result of this modernising trend that Buddhist ideas and practices have been evaluated to see if they can be rendered meaningful and useful within the context of modern worldviews. Both monastics and laypeople from historically Buddhist countries have been involved in attempts to modernise Buddhism, identifying the "core" teachings of the Buddha amongst so much cultural baggage and making them available to a modern audience.[15] Whilst some Buddhist ideas and practices retain pride of place in modernist interpretations,

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[13] See Donald Lopez, *Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008.

[14] Philip A. Mellor, 'Protestant Buddhism? The Cultural Translation of Buddhism in England', *Religion*, Vol. 21, 1991, p.76.

[15] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, pp.3-14,46.

considered relevant and useful, others are quietly ignored, regarded as antiquated or irrelevant in today's modern, increasingly secular, culture.[16]

This modernising trend is one of the reasons why the adoption of Buddhist meditation techniques for use in western psychotherapeutic contexts has been so successful. There were enough modernist interpretations of Buddhism around when Kabat-Zinn and others began adapting mindfulness for use in a clinical setting that little more needed to be stripped out. By Kabat-Zinn's time both mindfulness and the Buddhist path in general had already been prepared for a modernist audience, an audience who did not share the philosophical assumptions traditionally held by Buddhists. The modernist outlook is steeped in its emergence from, and conflict with, pre-modern religious outlooks. As a result, certain religious motifs such as divine beings, miracles and the afterlife present a prima facie problem for modern audiences. This secular disposition, along with the material advances brought about by the empirical sciences, has shaped modernist interpretations of Buddhism and, through them, secular approaches to mindfulness.

Whereas the traditional Buddhist framework is rooted in philosophical arguments combined with meditative insights, modern approaches are rooted in philosophical arguments combined with empirical observations. This allows for a successful narrative to take hold according to which the modernist has a poorer knowledge base when it comes to the 'inner world' and the Buddhist has a poorer knowledge base when it comes to the 'outer' material world.[17] The space that has been carved out for Buddhism within the modern worldview is as an "inner science" that can augment the "objective" sciences whilst also meeting some of the secularist's unmet spiritual needs. This would explain why Buddhism is so often identified with meditation: techniques of inner observation epitomize the way in which Buddhist practices can augment the modern

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[16] Ibid., pp.45-47, 218,219, 231.

[17] Lopez, *Buddhism and Science*, p.135. See also Dalai Lama, *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality,* New York, Morgan Road, 2005, p.4.

approach. This is likely to have helped to develop the profile of mindfulness, which was described by Nyanaponika Thera as 'The Heart of Buddhist Meditation' in his book of the same name.[18]

While modernising movements tend to identify mindfulness as epitomizing the Buddhist path, practices for cultivating compassion and doctrines such as no-self and impermanence also find a place within modernist views of what is central to Buddhism.[19] The successful retention of these additional practices and doctrines is not surprising when we consider their compatibility with other modernist motifs. Teachings on no-self, often glossed as the no-soul doctrine, fit comfortably with a secular, even anti-religious, culture. Equally, practices for cultivating universal compassion are highly compatible with the universalising values of enlightenment morality. Meanwhile, the doctrine of impermanence chimes well with scientific discoveries in physics, the recognition that we are all part of a ceaseless flux of forces.

Rebirth, on the other hand, represents a paradigm case of an aspect of traditional Buddhism that does *not* fit with the secular scientific aspirations of modernist approaches.[20] The traditional Buddhist cosmology, including the belief that sentient beings are reborn after death, is taken by many modernisers to be an example of Buddhism's religious baggage.[21] While aspects of Buddhist psychology and the term "karma" might be utilised in some modernist approaches, the core assumption is that the cosmology around rebirth is not particularly relevant when it comes to core Buddhist practices. This attitude to rebirth comes in a range of strengths. At one end of the spectrum we have those who adopt particular Buddhist ideas and practices but remain genuinely agnostic regarding rebirth. Jon Kabat-Zinn is a good example of someone in

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[18] Rupert Gethin, 'On some definitions of mindfulness', pp.263-279, in *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1, May 2011, p.266.

[19] See Lopez, *Buddhism and Science*, pp.186,187. See also McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 2008, pp.89-116. See also Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*, pp.74,135, 178, 387.

[20] See Owen Flanagan, *The Bodhisattva's Brain: Buddhism Naturalized*, MIT Press, 2011, pp.80-90.

[21] Ibid., p.65.

this category. Although Kabat-Zinn does not identify as a Buddhist, he describes what he does in terms of practising the 'Buddhadharma'.[22] But Kabat-Zinn never mentions rebirth, and this omission carries the implicit assumption that rebirth is not particularly relevant to practising the Buddhadharma, even if it is not completely implausible.

At the other end of the spectrum we have full-on revisionists who adopt Buddhist ideas and practices whilst trying to fit all of this into an explicitly secular or naturalistic framework. In such a framework, traditional Buddhist cosmology and belief in rebirth are considered far-fetched and implausible as well as irrelevant. Those at the revisionist end of the spectrum sometimes take the cosmology to be a contingent aspect of ancient Indian culture that became mixed in with the Buddha's core teachings after he died. Such core teachings are taken to be aimed simply at reducing suffering and so are perceived to have no necessary connection to belief in the afterlife.[23] Owen Flanagan, philosopher and author of *The Bodhisattva's Brain: Buddhism Naturalized*, is an excellent example of someone who does not self-identify as a Buddhist but nonetheless wishes to transform Buddhism into a secular ethics. Other revisionists, like Stephen Batchelor, identify as Buddhist whilst having a similar goal.

Batchelor's interpretation of Buddhism offers a good example of the kind of modernist revision that McMahan describes. Batchelor is highly critical of the traditional approach to Buddhist practice insofar as it presents rebirth as being an important feature of reality. In works such as *Confessions of a Buddhist Atheist, Buddhism without beliefs* and *After Buddhism* he is keen to reinterpret Buddhism for a secular age, presenting Siddhārtha Gautama as a thoroughly

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[22] See Jon Kabat-Zinn, 'Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR, Skillful Means, and the Trouble with Maps', *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2011, p.290.

[23] See Andrew Olendzki, 'The Construction of Mindfulness', *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* pp.55–70, Vol.12 No.1, 2011, p.56. See also Stephen Batchelor, *Confessions of a Buddhist Atheist,* New York, Spiegel, 2011, pp.97-110.

anti-metaphysical man and his teachings regarding rebirth as being for the sake of those trapped in the belief-system of their time.[24]

Batchelor's approach is aimed at those who engage with Buddhist teachings and practices outside of the traditional framework and for whom its cosmology appears strange and irrelevant to their concerns. For these practitioners the suggestion that they might be reborn after dying does not ring true, enrich their lives, nor act as a motivating factor for their engagement with Buddhist practices.[25] Such practitioners might consider the dearth of empirical evidence for future lives as a serious obstacle to taking it seriously. They might also find the very idea that the mind could continue to exist without a brain hard to believe given scientific evidence suggesting that mental processes depend on brain function.[26] For some, belief in rebirth may be viewed as an excuse to disengage from life and its suffering by seeking solace in a pleasant afterlife.[27]

By jettisoning Buddhist cosmology, the whole framework of Buddhist practice fits more comfortably into the worldview of a new audience. The easiest way to do this is to psychologise the cosmology, to interpret teachings about rebirth or about heaven and hell realms as making reference to extreme mental states and the way in which they condition one's experience of the environment.[28] The extent to which such an interpretation does actually psychologise the Buddhist cosmology is debatable. Whether we are discussing heaven, hell, hungry ghost, animal or human realms, within the Buddhist cosmology all such realms are taken to be the results of particular mental states.[29] As Rupert Gethin points out:

> The key to understanding the Buddhist cosmological scheme lies in the principle of *the equivalence of cosmology and psychology.* I

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[24] See Batchelor, *Confessions of a Buddhist Atheist,* pp.97-110. See also *Buddhism without Beliefs*, Penguin Publishing Group, 1998 and most recently *After Buddhism: Rethinking the Dharma for a Secular Age*, Yale University Press, 2016.
[25] See McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, pp.27-59.
[26] See Flanagan, *The Bodhisattva's Brain*, pp.80-90.
[27] See Batchelor, *Confessions of a Buddhist Atheist*, pp.97-110.
[28] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, pp.52-57.
[29] I will say a bit more on these realms later in this chapter.

> mean by this that in the traditional understanding the various realms of existence relate rather closely to certain commonly (and not so commonly) experienced states of mind. In fact Buddhist cosmology is at once a map of different realms of existence and a description of all possible experiences.[30]

If this is the case, what does it mean to give the traditional Buddhist cosmology a psychologised interpretation? The key to such an interpretation seems to be the claim that the Buddhist cosmology is *purely* psychological, that it describes all possible experiences but not actual realms of existence. The easiest way to make this claim is to offer a psychologised interpretation, not of the whole cosmology but simply of rebirth. If rebirth is simply the name given to the moment-by-moment transformation of one's experiences throughout a lifetime, rebirth in a heavenly or hellish realm refers to the transformation of experience into an extremely pleasant or an extremely unpleasant form *and nothing more*. According to such an interpretation, rebirth in the human realm comes to describe a particularly reflective and balanced mental state in which there is awareness of both happiness and suffering.[31] The central claim required for such an interpretation is that all these "rebirths" are psychological states that occur *within a single lifetime.* Once rebirth is psychologised in this way, the whole Buddhist cosmology becomes *purely* psychological.

Here we find the dividing line between a psychologised and a traditional interpretation of Buddhist cosmology.

While a traditional understanding of rebirth includes the idea that a being is reborn moment-by-moment it also, most importantly, involves the claim that this stream of momentary experiences does not cease at death.[32] According to the traditional view, a being can be reborn within any of the realms of possible experience after death. A psychologised view of Buddhist cosmology simply side-steps this claim and focusses on a single lifetime. In this way, the key to a psychologised account of Buddhist cosmology is the rejection of the multi-life

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[30] Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, pp.119,120.
[31] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, pp.52-57.
[32] Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, pp.215-217.

perspective as either accurate to reality or relevant to Buddhist practice. Once an interpretation of Buddhism has marginalised or ignored the multi-life perspective, the traditional cosmology disappears.

Conversely, once rebirth is established, we can recognise a range of possible afterlife experiences and sketch a rough cosmology. Our cosmological map would consist of all possible rebirths and would include realms ranging from the heavenly to the hellish. It would also include human and animal life along with other possible embodiments. This cosmological map would rapidly come to resemble something like the traditional Buddhist cosmology.

This is why rebirth is foundational to Buddhist cosmology. Buddhist cosmology can be rejected automatically if the multi-life perspective is incoherent or implausible. If one cannot continue to experience anything after death, there is little weight to cosmological claims that one will go on to experience heavenly, hellish or human realms. Batchelor's rejection of traditional Buddhist cosmology seems to be precisely on these grounds. He rejects rebirth as a core feature of Buddhism on the grounds that it does not have the demonstrability that other features of Buddhism do. And once rebirth is side-lined, the cosmology that depends upon it is side-lined as well.

According to Batchelor, the claim that a being continues to undergo the full range of experiences after death is not demonstrable in the experiential way that other foundational Buddhist claims are. Claims to the effect that life involves suffering, that one can achieve peace through certain practices, or that mindfulness cultivates concentration, would count as core Buddhist ideas for Batchelor insofar as their accuracy can be experienced after a certain amount of practice. What Batchelor attests to in *Confessions of a Buddhist Atheist* is that despite years as a Buddhist monk, he never found the kind of evidence for the Buddhist afterlife that he found for the value of a Buddhist way of life.[33]

[33] Batchelor, *Confessions of a Buddhist Atheist*, pp.19-44.

The need to experience the truth of traditional Buddhist claims constitutes a key aspect of what makes Batchelor's approach to Buddhism distinctly modernist. David McMahan highlights an emphasis on individual experience as one of the key features of Buddhist Modernism. Modernist Buddhist practice involves open inquiry into the nature of oneself and reality that need not take account of traditional Buddhist doctrines, scriptures or monastic authorities. Such de-traditionalised approaches to Buddhism rate the reliability of individual experience above claims made by traditional Buddhist authorities.[34] The value of traditional Buddhist sources comes to be determined by their relevance to the individual practitioner rather than the merits of the source itself.

McMahan argues that this is a notable departure from the way in which Buddhism has been traditionally manifested. In countries such as Thailand, Myanmar, Tibet and Sri Lanka, Buddhism involves rituals and beliefs about karma and rebirth that are not presented as open to question.[35] He claims that the conception of Buddhism as a matter of individual inquiry free from institutional and authoritarian constraints has been heavily influenced by attitudes originating in the reformation and the enlightenment, in which the status of the individual was elevated and appeals to traditional beliefs and authority were challenged.[36]

However, in discussing the contrasts between traditional and de-traditionalised modes of Buddhist practice, we would not want to fall into the trap of assuming that the Buddhist Modernist is supremely rational and the traditionalist is a superstitious dogmatist. It is important to remember that there are reasons why the doctrinal, scriptural and monastic authorities to whom one might appeal if living in a traditional Buddhist country are perceived to possess this authority. Both the Buddhist scriptures and the monastic community are able to offer doctrinal insights as well as practical instructions to the Buddhist practitioner.[37]

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[34] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, pp.42-44.
[35] Ibid., pp.27-42.
[36] Ibid., pp.3-25.
[37] Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, pp.35-58.

The monastic life is also considered by Buddhist standards to be the most conducive to the development of the ethical conduct and mental stability needed to generate the insights towards which the Buddhist path leads.[38]

When appraising the traditional approach to Buddhist practice, it is important to bear in mind that it presents the Buddhadharma as a path. It follows from this that one person can be further along the path than another and therefore more reliable as a guide. The foundational doctrines of Buddhism such as no self, dependent-origination, karma and rebirth are taken to be the result of profound insight. They are not generally taken to be self-evident truths equally comprehensible to all.[39] It is assumed that the full meaning of Buddhist doctrine requires extensive study and reflection to be clearly understood. The vast majority of traditional Buddhists, who lack the time to engage in such extensive study, place their trust in those who are presumed to have developed a greater amount of insight. This generally leads them to accept the doctrinal convictions of monastics, advanced practitioners, or the wider Buddhist community.

Nevertheless, we must accept that there are dangers involved in placing too much faith in authority derived from what we could call spiritual achievements. It is to be expected that achievements such as psychological wellbeing, meditative prowess or doctrinal expertise would draw a certain amount of respect. But an individual or group may have mastered a range of psychological or intellectual abilities without this increasing their ability to verify the truth of metaphysical claims. The risk is that we assume that the accumulation of scriptural knowledge and the development of meditative skill automatically leads to the capacity to directly verify the truth of Buddhist cosmological claims.

In his account of living as a Gelug Tibetan Buddhist monk, Batchelor provides an example in which the connection between spiritual development and prestige can actually *decrease* overall interest in pursuing or supporting honest inquiry into the truth of claims. He describes how the educational paradigm that

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[38] Ibid., pp.85-111.
[39] Ibid., p.24.

was in place during his monastic training did not encourage open inquiry in which every possibility is equally considered. Rather, there was a correct doctrinal answer and other viewpoints were presented simply to be ruled out. This meant that failure to completely accept the truth of certain claims was viewed as an educational failure. Batchelor claims that insofar as he genuinely questioned the doctrine of rebirth, he was seen as an embarrassment to his teacher. His teacher, Geshe Rab-ten, feared that he would develop a bad reputation through being responsible for such a poorly educated monk. As a result, Batchelor claims, he was pressured into keeping his doubts to himself.[40]

Interestingly, the particular approach of Geshe Rab-ten is explored by Georges Dreyfus in *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: the Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk.* According to Dreyfus, Geshe Rab-ten took the view that debate was merely a method by which students could internalize the teachings of the tradition. He explains how Geshe Rab-ten saw the student-teacher relationship as 'a context for the transmission of the truth, all of whose details were decided by the tradition.'[41] But Dreyfus is clear that this pedagogical perspective was not adopted by every teacher in the tradition and only gained popularity due to a sectarian revival in the early twentieth century.

Whether we consider Batchelor's experience to be the result of a particularly dogmatic teacher or the tradition itself, it doesn't take a great deal of investigation to discover that, where a belief is considered by a group or institution to be a fundamental doctrine, pressure is often exerted on individuals to share that belief, regardless of the strength of arguments in its favour. As a result, a belief can receive widespread support and inform people's practices without being particularly plausible. It makes sense, then, to be sceptical when it comes to religious or institutional doctrines regardless of the character and qualities of those who advocate them. If we find that a particular Buddhist

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[40] Batchelor, *Confessions of a Buddhist Atheist*, p.45. See also McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, pp.39,40.

[41] Georges Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: the Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk*, University of California Press, 2003, p.273.

tradition has quashed genuine debate by discouraging practitioners from questioning the truth of rebirth, this provides a reason not to take its claims about the afterlife seriously.

However, although we should maintain vigilance regarding the cultural and institutional context in which different claims have been espoused, we cannot justify the assumption that the quashing of genuine inquiry has been the norm within every intellectual tradition throughout history, Buddhist or otherwise. Even in the Tibetan Tradition we find a spectrum of teachers who range from the dogmatic to the inquiring. Dreyfus dedicates an entire chapter of *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping* to exploring the differences between Geshe Rab-ten, for whom debate was simply a means to learn the key texts, and Gen Nyi-ma, for whom debate was a way to scrutinise those texts. Buddhism, in general, has a rich history of philosophical inquiry that, thanks to recent translation and scholarship, is increasingly accessible. This history stretches back to the lively debates between Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools of thought in ancient India. Buddhist philosophy developed in a milieu of debate that included different Buddhist, Hindu and also anti-religious materialist schools.

Although there might be times and places where Buddhist practitioners become somewhat insular, failing to debate with those who disagree fundamentally with their views, Buddhism could not have thrived in India if this approach was the norm. It is for this reason that we can use the work of Indian Buddhist philosophers in order to defend key Buddhist claims. There are no automatic reasons why the principles and premises used in Buddhist arguments for key metaphysical and cosmological claims should not be persuasive today. We should not ignore these arguments even if we can find evidence that they are not always being tested as forcefully as we might wish. Nor should we assume that every one of the assumptions and arguments that grounds modernist discourses is beyond question.

A respectable modernist interpretation of Buddhism should critically assess modernist discourses, particularly scientific ones, whilst also critically engaging with the Buddhist philosophical framework aimed at justifying and making sense of traditional cosmological ideas such as rebirth. Such interpretations should

neither assume a triumphalist position, according to which modern intellectual culture has superseded all possible alternative philosophies, nor sink into a disengaged scepticism regarding the kind of metaphysical questions that Buddhist philosophy has attempted to answer.

Interpreters of Buddhism should certainly resist the tendency, evident in the work of Batchelor and others, simply to tell a story about the Buddha or Buddhism, which reinforces certain philosophical assumptions without actually engaging critically with them. By conceiving of the Buddha as a modernist with no interest in anything metaphysical or cosmological, Batchelor and secular modernist interpreters who take a similar approach are able to avoid engaging with the metaphysical arguments that exist for and against rebirth. This involves appealing to the authority of the Buddha, a weak argumentative approach given that our only knowledge of what the Buddha taught comes from sources that suggest he taught extensively about rebirth.

Insofar as revisionist interpreters present the Buddha as an anti-metaphysical sceptic who completely rejected the cosmology of his time, they must likewise advocate a sharp dividing line between the Buddha and those who compiled and transmitted the earliest scriptures. But it is only through the earliest followers of the Buddha that we have any impression of what he taught. Buddhist scholarship suggests that even the earliest Buddhist scriptures were very unlikely to have been transmitted verbatim as fixed texts from the Buddha's own mouth. This is why, as Rupert Gethin points out, 'the task of identifying sharp fault lines between what the Buddha taught and what his early followers tell us he taught is far from straightforward.'[42] The scriptures suggesting that the Buddha's teachings offered a cosmological framework that included rebirth are from more or less the same sources as those scriptures that suggest that the Buddha taught anything.

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[42] Rupert Gethin, 'Review of Gombrich, Richard F., What the Buddha Thought', *H-Buddhism, H-Net Reviews*, January, 2012, p.3.

We have little reason to take the claim that the Buddha taught about rebirth and a cosmology influenced by karmic actions any less seriously than claims that he offered teachings on the path to liberation from suffering. This is why relying on the Buddha's support to establish a fault line within Buddhist teachings between "serious practice" and "metaphysical nonsense" is such a flawed approach. As Gethin warns, 'The danger is that we begin to see the fault lines where we want to see them.'[43] Here it is interesting to consider the words of E.P. Sanders, who wrote about the many attempts to discover the historical Jesus: 'People want to agree with Jesus, and this often means that they see him as agreeing with themselves.'[44] As Gethin points out, the same could be said of the historical Buddha.

Rather than invoking their own vision of the historical Buddha, those who wish to partition Buddhist teachings in this way should come up with independent reasons for rejecting its cosmological aspects. Some Buddhist modernisers might, for example, be justified in making such a partition in virtue of their audience. If the audience of Buddhist teachings doesn't want to hear about karma or rebirth, if they cannot connect with such teachings, this may be a reason to leave out certain cosmological aspects. This is one of the reasons why those attempting to introduce Buddhist practices to non-Buddhist audiences tend to de-emphasise and perhaps even re-interpret traditional Buddhist beliefs that may get in the way of people benefitting from Buddhist practices. Practices such as mindfulness are often presented in this "agnostic" manner, being aimed chiefly at wellbeing in this life without reference to traditional Buddhist doctrines which make reference to an afterlife.[45]

While this is clearly a noble motivation, some believe that this should be recognised simply as a pragmatic way of helping others and not a rejection of

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[43] Ibid., p.3.
[44] E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus,* London, Penguin, 1993, p.6.
[45] See Jon Kabat-Zinn, 'Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR, Skillful Means, and the Trouble with Maps', *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* pp.281–306, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2011, pp.281-288. See also Olendzki, 'The Construction of Mindfulness', p.56.

foundational Buddhist ideas.[46] That there are good reasons for taking a pragmatic approach to teaching *newcomers* about Buddhist practices does not automatically justify taking the same approach to Buddhist teaching and practice *as a whole*. When teaching a student how to practice, it makes good sense to distil over two-thousand years of Buddhist theory into just those aspects that are relevant to the student's situation. But this does not make sense when presenting the Buddha's teachings, as we understand them, to an audience who wish to know what Siddhārtha Gautama taught. If the audience wants to understand such teachings, on what basis can we justify leaving out foundational features that have been central to over two-thousand year of Buddhist theory? It would be a disservice to the audience to present them with only those features of Buddhism that fit with contemporary intellectual attitudes. It would be downright dishonest to present them with only those features that fit with *our own* attitudes or to misrepresent certain features as less significant because *we* do not take them seriously.

Those interpreters of Buddhism who have *philosophical* reasons for not taking Buddhist cosmology seriously should be up front about those reasons, presenting and defending them. They should not merely tell a story that fails to engage with the philosophical questions that philosophers, Buddhist and western alike, have long been interested in. Such questions regard the ultimate nature of consciousness and its place in reality, as well as the meaning of life amidst the problems of suffering and death. The same philosophical approaches that touch on these subjects are applicable to the question of whether rebirth is a plausible afterlife possibility. In order to appropriately assess whether the rebirth aspect of Buddhism is mere cultural baggage, one must first engage with these philosophical issues.

Overall, in giving traditional Buddhist beliefs a fair hearing, we should navigate between what might be seen by modernists as an overly credulous faith in

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[46] Bhikkhu Bodhi, 'What does mindfulness really mean? A canonical perspective', pp.19-39, in *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1, May 2011, pp.35-36.

Buddhist institutions and what might be seen by traditional Buddhists as an ignorance of modern philosophical weaknesses and of Buddhism's intellectual resources. These resources include arguments that can be engaged with in their own right.

Nevertheless, in engaging with these arguments, we must accept that we will be to some extent de-traditionalising them. It makes sense to approach arguments for foundational Buddhist beliefs such as rebirth from a position of scepticism even though adopting this position means we will miss out on some of the factors that have traditionally supported such beliefs. Neither the compassion nor wisdom of those advocating such beliefs nor any psychological benefits of adopting them can be considered. The plausibility of Buddhist cosmology and rebirth in particular will stand or fall on the strength of arguments for them rather than on appeals to traditional sources such as doctrine, scripture or institutional authority.

However, it remains the case that the traditional Buddhist belief in rebirth has been the subject of discussion and debate since Siddhārtha Gautama was teaching. Although we can find various Buddhist schools of thought there is a common heritage regarded as foundational to all Buddhist schools. This common heritage includes a basic philosophical approach to reality and to consciousness that has defined how Buddhists justify the 'working hypothesis' that death is followed by rebirth.[47] I wish to bring attention to this basic philosophical approach as a means to bring it into the discussion regarding the modernisation and secularisation of Buddhist practice.

1.4 Mindful Life or Mindful Lives? An Overview

As we have seen, the adoption of mindfulness into clinical and secular self-help contexts has been aided by attempts to modernise Buddhism, which have

[47] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 'The Truth of Rebirth: And Why it Matters for Buddhist Practice', *Access to Insight,* BCBS Edition, 30 November 2013.

marginalised and in places psychologised the role of traditional Buddhist cosmology. This marginalisation of Buddhist cosmology is rationalised as an attempt to align with the attitudes of a modern, broadly secular, audience. But such rationalisation only amounts to justification if a modern audience has no reason to take Buddhist cosmology seriously. If a case can be made for the plausibility of rebirth as an afterlife possibility, modern audiences have a reason to take it seriously as well as the de-psychologised cosmology that springs from it.

This is why the debate as to whether 'secular modern techniques of mindfulness free mindfulness from the burden of its outmoded Buddhist cultural baggage or deprive it of the essential humanising vision that should be at its core' turns on the question of whether a secular mindfulness practitioner can be given good reasons to take the Buddhist belief in rebirth seriously. The debate would, therefore, benefit from an investigation into the traditional Buddhist philosophical system to see if it can be used to offer reasons for a non-Buddhist to believe in rebirth, specifically when this system is approached using relevant concepts used in modern western philosophy. The aim of this project is to attempt such an investigation.

This investigation will involve engagement with traditional Buddhist philosophical systems but will also attempt to ensure that the key principles and ideas of these systems are accessible to non-Buddhists. Where it helps, I will relate Buddhist philosophical ideas to relevant ideas within contemporary Anglophone philosophy, often referred to as western philosophy, which includes analytic and continental philosophical traditions. Overall, I will attempt to be sympathetic to the traditional Buddhist multi-life perspective, seeking reasons for its plausibility. Where existing arguments struggle or fail I will highlight this and attempt alternatives that might be compatible with Buddhist philosophical principles. In this respect I will be acting as something of the consultant for traditional Buddhists who wish to present their cosmology as plausible.

In the next chapter I will explore the historical Buddhist arguments for rebirth and identify the key philosophical principles that support them. I will argue that,

despite the historical debates that took place between the adherents of different early Buddhist philosophical *Abhidharma* systems, three basic principles can be found that seem to be used within the earliest known argument for rebirth made by Buddhist philosopher Dharmakīrti.

In the third chapter I will survey some of the works of scholarship that have evaluated Buddhist ideas and the arguments and assumption behind them. What should emerge is something of an overview of how the Buddhist multi-life hypothesis has been approached in philosophical works that have sought justification for key Buddhist ideas. While an increased interest in Buddhist philosophy has not been accompanied by a deeper engagement with Buddhist claims about the afterlife, this is despite the fact that views regarding the potential for phenomenal consciousness to persist beyond death rest upon increasingly contested assumptions about the nature of consciousness.

Chapter Four will explore how consciousness is understood within both western and Buddhist philosophy. These approaches to consciousness will be explored with particular regard to Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth. This argument relies on two key premises: (1) Consciousness is distinct from other non-conscious phenomena, particularly physical phenomena. (2) An instance of consciousness must be preceded by a cause with the same intrinsic nature. I will then examine Evan Thompson's treatment of Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth in *Waking, Dreaming, Being* in order to show what needs to be established in order for it to be successful. This will involve showing why empirical methods requiring objective evidence fail to support claims about the nature of consciousness and its capacity to survive death. What are required are metaphysical arguments about the nature of consciousness and what can or cannot bring it into existence.

Chapter Five will then show how, within contemporary philosophy of mind, the kind of metaphysical argumentation used by Dharmakīrti can be found in arguments to support panpsychism. In his argument for panpsychism, Galen Strawson denies that the physical processes of the body and brain are devoid of consciousness by defending what is essentially the second premise of Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth. According to panpsychism, consciousness

cannot emerge from intrinsically unconscious phenomena but it *can* arise from purely physical factors *as long as these factors are intrinsically conscious*. I will argue that Strawson's argument is persuasive and provides support for the second premise of Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth.

In Chapter Six, I will address Evan Thompson's alternative to panpsychism in which phenomenal consciousness emerges from mere potential for consciousness. The chapter will present reasons for rejecting Thompsons view. It will then go on to address the fact that Galen Strawson's constitutive version of panpsychism presents a threat to Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth. In particular, the view that a single stream of conscious experience survives death and continues into future lives is not compatible with constitutive panpsychism. Arguments against constitutive panpsychism will be presented in order to show that the singular conscious subject of our current experience cannot be produced from multiple conscious subjects.

Chapter Seven will then explore reasons for believing that the core conditions for conscious experience can only ever arise as a single "cluster". These core conditions will be shown to consist of an individual instance of phenomenally conscious apprehension, anticipation, retention, and immediate recollection of objects embedded within a temporal structure. It will be argued that every instance of phenomenally conscious experience requires these factors and that the separation of any one of them from the others not only makes phenomenal consciousness impossible but also makes every remaining factor incapable of accounting for the particular characteristics found in conscious experience. In this case, the division of a consciousness cluster would preclude any possibility of that phenomenal consciousness ever existing. This is why we must assume that, for every instance of phenomenal consciousness, there is a cluster of factors that have never, in the history of reality, arisen in isolation from one another. This justifies believing that any instance of conscious experience involves an indivisible consciousness cluster and that this instance is part of an unbroken stream of such instances. Such a stream would continue even through physical death.

Chapter Eight will address some of the questions that remain once we have reasons to believe that our stream of phenomenal consciousness can continue after bodily death. The first part of the chapter will address the neuroscientific evidence suggesting that our psychological traits are dependent upon particular brain functions. This evidence poses a problem for traditional Buddhist claims that wholesome mind states can be developed across multiple lives. To address this problem, I will argue that the capacity for retaining passing experience, which is inseparable from consciousness, results in the experiential history of a stream of consciousness becoming embedded within its structure. This embedded experiential history influences the precise quality of presently occurring conscious experiences. Examples will then be offered to suggest ways in which the impact of mind training practices in one life could influence the character of psychological factors occurring in later lives.

The second part of the chapter will address the question of how a conscious event, with its embedded history, interacts with physical events. In particular it will suggest ways in which we might try to understand the relationship between the physical processes and the illuminating, retaining, and temporal structuring processes of consciousness. At this point the question of mental causation will be addressed and it will be argued that physical events must be, by their very nature, responsive to conscious events. From here the chapter will touch upon the question of what might happen within the stream of conscious events after bodily death and why this suggests that streams of consciousness can be reborn in newly developing bodies.

This investigation will conclude that we have good reasons to take seriously the view that an instance of conscious experience is preceded by a prior instance of conscious experience and that this stream of instances is unbroken. Taking such a view, physical birth cannot be considered the point at which conscious experience emerges from non-conscious factors nor can bodily death be the point at which the stream of consciousness transforms into completely different non-conscious factors. Some concluding thoughts will then be offered regarding post-mortem consciousness, further possibilities for exploration, and the significance of this argument for non-Buddhist practitioners of mindfulness.

2. Buddhist Philosophy and Rebirth

2.1 Introduction: How to approach a Buddhist defence of Rebirth?

Debates regarding the secularisation of Buddhist practices, particularly mindfulness, would benefit from an investigation into whether good reasons can be offered for non-Buddhists, as well as Buddhists, to take the traditional Buddhist multi-life perspective seriously. In attempting such an investigation, I will stick to Buddhist form in following a middle-way between two undesirable extremes. The first extreme would be to ignore Buddhist philosophy as a whole and simply offer an argument for the possibility that death is followed by rebirth. The risk is that such an approach might develop arguments that do not take into account any Buddhist philosophical commitments. There are, for example, a number of arguments for substance dualism, which allow for the possibility of personal existence after death.[1] The problem with these arguments is that they amount to an argument for a substantial, enduring self. Such an argument would be difficult to reconcile with the earliest Buddhist teachings on no-self and impermanence. Without trying to accommodate Buddhist philosophical principles there is a risk that the key premises of an argument for rebirth will end up being incompatible with key Buddhist ideas.

However, the second extreme would be to get stuck in a particular Buddhist school's vision of what an argument for rebirth must look like. One might adopt a set of principles that are only relevant to a small sub-set of Buddhist traditions. Such a narrow approach would potentially develop into a defence of rebirth that is only accessible to those who adhere to a particular Buddhist school. On a more practical note, a defence of such a position would require either ignoring or otherwise fully unpacking a number of historical debates between particular Buddhist schools. Adopting a very specific and potentially controversial position

[1] A classic argument for this kind would be that of Descartes; see René Descartes, *Meditations,* trans. Desmond M. Clarke, London, Penguin Books, 2000. For a similar, updated argument see Richard Swinburne, *Mind, Brain, and Free Will*, Oxford University Press, 2013.

without defending it would be philosophically lazy but addressing all of these issues would take far too much time.

The middle-path that I will take involves establishing some key premises that are compatible with the widest number of Buddhist schools. The aim is to find some foundational philosophical principles that are as common as the belief in rebirth itself. In this respect I will not be looking for a canonical Buddhist argument for rebirth. Such a search would prove fruitless insofar as it would amount to a search for a defence of rebirth offered by the Buddha himself. Although there are recorded discourses in which the Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama argues in favour of taking rebirth and karma as working hypotheses, his argument does not aim to defend the plausibility of these ideas. In the *Apaṇṇaka Sutta*, for example, Gautama offers a brief pragmatic argument that entertaining the possibility of rebirth can help to motivate renunciant life rather than a philosophical treatise on why the multi-life perspective should be adopted by those who do not already hold it.[2]

In the *Apaṇṇaka Sutta*, Gautama presents something of a Buddhist wager, prefiguring Blaise Pascal by millennia. Like Pascal's wager, the claim is that there is much to gain and nothing to lose by assuming that positive actions in this life provide benefits in future lives while negative actions in this life provide misery in future lives. Conversely, there is nothing to gain and much to lose if we assume that this is not the case. Gautama assumes that adopting a multi-life perspective combined with a belief in a form of moral causation linking moral action with pleasant results and immoral action with unpleasant results will motivate moral conduct. This conduct will be praised in this life and possibly bring benefits in the next. Without the multi-life perspective combined with a belief in moral causation this added motivation will be absent. One might still find other reasons to act morally but nothing extra is gained. The risk is that no

[2] See 'Apaṇṇaka Sutta', in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*, trans. Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, London, Wisdom Publication, 1995, pp.506-520.

alternative motivation is found and immoral conduct becomes tempting. This results in disapproval in this life and possible misery in the next.[3]

But Gautama's wager is not an argument for the plausibility of the multi-life perspective. It is an argument for the pragmatic benefits of such a perspective combined with a belief in moral causation. It is equivalent to a holiday brochure showing the benefits of a destination rather than a map on how one gets there. Gautama is suggesting that, if we can find reasons to take this cosmology seriously, it will serve us well in our moral and spiritual development. His argument does not provide those reasons.

Nor do we find dedicated arguments for rebirth in the attempts to systematise Gautama's teachings in the generations after his death. The commentaries and philosophical systems that developed in the first millennium after the time of the Buddha did not focus on defending the multi-life perspective. This makes sense when we consider how widespread such a perspective was in ancient India. The dominant Brahmanical teachings of the Vedas and Upanishads as well as Jain teachings all presupposed the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.[4] The Buddha's teachings are comparable to Jain and Brahmanical teachings insofar as he was part of a shared renunciant tradition. Renunciant traditions sought liberation from the endless cycle of rebirth through contemplative and devotional practices.[5]

The only well-known school that rejected an afterlife as well as the search for liberation was the Cārvāka School. The Cārvākas were a materialist school who identified the person with the body. As such they considered death to be the end of the body and the end of the person.[6] Like followers of the Buddha, the Cārvākas were considered unorthodox compared to followers of the Vedic and

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[3] See Nigel Tetley, The Doctrine of Rebirth In Theravāda Buddhism: Arguments for and against, Doctoral Thesis, University of Bristol, 1990, pp.54, 55.

[4] Roy W. Perrett, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy,* Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp.8-10.

[5] Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, pp.9-11.

[6] See Perrett, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, pp.169,170.

Upanishadic teachings. The Cārvākas did not hold the sort of sway that would have required Gautama to provide arguments against their position. This remained true for the early period after Gautama's death. There was little benefit in spending time defending the doctrine of rebirth in a time when, as Richard Hayes points out, 'most other philosophical systems in India were, like Buddhism, based on the notion that the foremost predicament for all living beings is that they are bound to experience the consequences of actions performed in previous lives'.[7] It was the doctrine of no-self rather than the doctrine of rebirth than set Buddhism apart from its philosophical contemporaries.

The Buddhist position regarding the existence of the self was a strong contrast to the orthodox Hindu schools.[8] These schools, along with the Jain school, considered the self to be a substantial entity, often referred to as the Atman. While the orthodox schools differed as to the true nature of the self, they did not disagree about its substantial reality. Gautama's teachings were developed into a systematic philosophy in response to ongoing debate with these so-called Atmanic schools. Arguments were required in order to clarify how phenomena like memory and moral responsibility can function without a self. The question of precisely what is reborn if there is no self was also addressed in response to challenge from Atmanic schools that considered the self to survive death. Such schools wanted Buddhists to account for how their philosophy makes sense of rebirth.[9] These arguments were therefore based on a common agreement that the multi-life perspective was accurate. It was only once debate got going between Buddhists and materialists like the Cārvākas that an argument aimed specifically at justifying rebirth was required. As Hayes remarks, once

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[7] Richard P. Hayes, 'Dharmakīrti on Punarbhava', *Studies in Original Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism,* Vol. 1, 1993, p.111.

[8] The orthodox schools of classical Indian philosophy are often listed as six paired schools: Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkya-Yoga, and Mīmāṃsā-Vedānta. See Perrett, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, pp.10-12.

[9] Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, p.140.

philosophers began to challenge the multi-life perspective 'it was no longer possible for Buddhist apologists to take the doctrine of rebirth for granted.'[10]

Amongst those Buddhist philosophers who rose to the challenge of providing 'a reasoned defence of the doctrine of rebirth' Dharmakīrti (circa 600-660 CE) is perhaps the most commonly cited.[11] His argument, found in his *Pramānavārttika*, is one of the earliest that we know of and directly influenced those of later Buddhist philosophers. At the heart of Dharmakīrti's argument is the claim that 'among the causes of any cognition is an immediately preceding moment of awareness'.[12] It follows from this central claim that even the very first mental event of a sentient being's life must have amongst its causes a preceding moment of awareness. If bodily processes are purely physical, lacking in any degree of awareness, they cannot be the sole causes of mental events. The cognitive, conscious character of mental events can only come about due to a prior event of the same kind. Therefore our current cognition must be the latest in a chain of mental events, each contributing to the arising of the next. Because we cannot posit a beginning to this causal chain, the beginning of this present life cannot be the beginning of our conscious existence. Dharmakīrti concludes that previous lives must be posited, following a pattern of birth, death and rebirth, in order to explain the origins of consciousness in this life.

2.2 Buddhist Philosophical Principles for Defending Rebirth

The central principles employed by Dharmakīrti in his argument in defence of rebirth can be found at work in the arguments of Śāntarakṣita (circa 725-783 CE), who was one of the central figures in the establishment of Buddhism in

[10] Hayes, 'Dharmakīrti on Punarbhava', p.111.
[11] Ibid., p.112. See also Dan Arnold, *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing,* New York, Columbia University Press, 2012, p.2.
[12] Arnold, *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing*, p.33.

Tibet.[13] This connection with Tibet might explain why we find the same sort of argumentation showing up in defences of the multi-life perspective by Tibetan Buddhist teachers.[14] Tibetan Buddhism is both popular in western countries and also boasts a number of western scholars who are quite vocal in advocating the multi-life perspective to secular audiences.[15] This is one of the reasons why Dharmakīrti's argument provides an important reference point for this project. As a respected argument for rebirth, Dharmakīrti's will hopefully provide some of the basic premises necessary for a successful argument that is also accessible to non-Buddhist audiences.

However, these premises are not exclusive to Dharmakīrti's argument. The core principles of his argument for rebirth can be found in the earliest Buddhist philosophical approaches. These early philosophies were attempts to formulate a comprehensive approach from the orally transmitted (and eventually transcribed) teachings of the Buddha known as the *Suttas* (Pali) or *Sutras* (Sanskrit). Because the Buddha's teachings were given in specific contexts to specific audiences, commentaries were composed in order to develop these specific teachings into a system of thought that could be applied generally. These attempts at systematisation took the form of commentaries on the Buddha's teachings and are known as *Abhidhamma* in the Pali language and *Abhidharma* in Sanskrit, both of which have the approximate meaning of 'Higher' or 'Further' teachings.[16]

There is evidence that the earliest attempts to provide an overall commentary on the Buddha's philosophical approach took place during his lifetime. One example is found in the *Mahāvedalla Sutta,* which recounts how a nun was

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[13] Matthew T. Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory*, Oxford University Press USA, 2000, pp.24, 25. For an exploration of Śāntarakṣita's argument, see Roy Perrett, 'Rebirth', in *Religious Studies,* Vol. 23, March, 1987, pp.41-57.

[14] See, among others, Robert Thurman, *Infinite Life,* New York, Riverhead Books, 2004, pp.4-8

[15] As well as Thurman (Ibid.), see B. Alan Wallace, *Choosing Reality: A Buddhist View of Physics and the Mind,* New York, Snow Lion, 2003, pp.184-5.

[16] Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, p.47.

asked about aspects of the technical vocabulary used in the Buddha's teachings.[17] No doubt there will have been plenty of circumstances in which the Buddha's followers were asked, in his absence, about the key points of his teachings. There is also evidence that the earliest attempts at giving a 'full and systematic statement of the Buddha's teaching on the basis of what is found in his discourses' were also most likely to have occurred during Siddhārtha Gautama's lifetime.[18] This is why Gethin considers it legitimate 'to see the exposition of the basic principles and methods of Abhidharma as the product of the first generation of the Buddha's disciples.'[19]

Nevertheless, after Gautama's lifetime a variety of interpretations and applications of the basic principles and methods found in the discourses led to the development of a range of systematic Buddhist approaches to the nature of reality.[20] Different schools emerged with their own commentarial literature, their approach to systematising the Buddha's teachings. Here the term school is used to mean "school of thought" rather than something stronger like "sect" or "denomination". The early Buddhist schools followed the same root teacher, Siddhārtha Gautama, and adopted the philosophical principles and methods taught by him. They differed in terms of the positions that they took on key philosophical questions that arose as a result of applying these principles and methods to reality.

Our knowledge about the existence of this variety of early Buddhist schools comes from the details provided in the range of Abhidharma texts that have survived the millennia since their composition. Of these Abhidhamma texts, those that have come down to us in a complete form are the canonical texts of the Theravāda Abhidhamma (preserved in the Pali language) and the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma (preserved in the Chinese and Tibetan, having been translated from Sanskrit) as well as a series of later treatises (in Pali and

[17] Ibid., p.47.
[18] Ibid., p.48.
[19] Ibid., p.54.
[20] Ibid., pp.203-208

Sanskrit, and in Chinese and Tibetan translation) belonging to both schools. The canonical texts of the Yogācāra Abhidharma also survive thanks to Chinese translations, but only in part, although a number of treatises of Yogācāra Abhidharma also survive in Sanskrit and in Tibetan translation. There were many more Abhidharma commentaries in ancient India that have influenced today's Buddhist traditions but that have since disappeared along with the schools that followed them. All that remains of these systems and their respective schools of thought are the arguments against them preserved in the surviving works of their opponents.[21]

Overall, despite the diversity of Buddhist traditions in terms of both cultural practices and geographical locations, most Buddhist traditions draw on the philosophical principles found in Abhidharma commentaries.[22] Furthermore, these commentaries adopt common philosophical principles and methods, having their roots in the earliest commentaries of the first generation of the Buddha's disciples.[23] This is why Gethin suggests that something of the Abhidharma method must go back to the lifetime of the Buddha himself: 'Certainly much of its outlook and many of its principles must be regarded as still forming part of the common heritage of Buddhism'.[24]

We can make a clear distinction between, on the one hand, the Abhidharma principles and methods, which were derived from the discourses of the Buddha very early on, and on the other hand, the variety of Abhidharma schools that developed once these principles and methods were worked into comprehensive philosophical systems. The Theravāda Abhidhamma, as well as the Sarvāstivāda and Yogācāra Abhidharmas, represent attempts at providing a comprehensive Buddhist analysis of reality. They also represent the

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[21] Ibid., p.49.

[22] The Theravāda Buddhism of Sri Lanka and South-East Asia is directly informed by the Theravāda Abhidhamma while philosophical developments in the Buddhisms of Tibet and China drew heavily on the Sarvāstivāda and Yogācāra Abhidharmas. Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, pp.244-273.

[23] Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, p.54.

[24] Ibid. p.48.

application of fundamental philosophical principles and methods of analysis used by Siddhārtha Gautama.

The principles and methods of analysis that are shared by the different Abhidharma schools, having been derived from the Buddha's teachings, are those employed by Dharmakīrti (and later Śāntarakṣita) in arguments defending the multi-life perspective. These principles form a philosophical foundation for most of the Buddhist traditions that exist to this day. It is for this reason that the core principles of Abhidharma should be both compatible with the commitments of most Buddhist schools and capable of providing some support to an argument defending the plausibility of rebirth. I wish to present the three core Abhidharma principles that will be crucial in an argument for taking the traditional Buddhist multi-life perspective seriously. I will refer to these as:

1) The Chariot Principle
2) The Cluster Principle
3) The Continuity Principle

These three principles are logically connected insofar as adopting the first opens the way to adopting the following two. In order to show how this is the case I will demonstrate how and why these Abhidharma principles have been supported and applied.

2.3 Abhidharma Principle I – The Chariot Principle

One of the clearest demonstrations of the application of Abhidharma principles is found in *Milinda's Questions*. This text recounts a (most likely imagined) conversation between the Bactrian King Milinda (150-110 BCE) and a monk who introduces himself as Nāgasena. The monk claims that "Nāgasena" is simply a convenient label because ultimately there is no individual who can be found. The king initially dismisses this claim as nonsense and so, in response, Nāgasena provides an analysis of King Milinda's chariot in order to show that it

cannot be found.[25] Analysing the chariot, we find the pole, axle, wheels, framework and reins but we find nothing that *is* the chariot. All that can be found when we analyse the object is multiple parts or features and the convention to unify and label this multiplicity as if it were a single entity. Nothing can be found aside from the parts and their designation as "chariot". Such designations are a convenience but ultimately there is no chariot beyond the label.[26]

Echoing Gautama's teachings, Nāgasena goes on to explain to the king how this analysis can be applied to individuals such as himself. When we analyse ourselves we find five types of feature: the physical features of the body as well as feelings, cognitions, volitions and consciousness.[27] Aside from these five psychophysical factors (frequently referred to as aggregates) there is no self. Like the chariot, the self is neither among nor separate from the parts; "self" is merely a convenient label. The wisdom that recognises this inability to find an ultimate self among or separate from the aggregates is referred to in various places as the wisdom of no-self, the wisdom of selflessness or the wisdom of emptiness (meaning emptiness of self). Regardless of the precise terminology, this is the kind of wisdom that Buddhist practitioners have traditionally sought to cultivate in order to be liberated from the cycle of rebirth.

The precise philosophical moves being made by Nāgasena are explored thoroughly in Mark Siderits' *Buddhism as Philosophy* and also in Amber Carpenter's *Indian Buddhist Philosophy* but the primary principle at work is that to exist in the ultimate sense is to be something in particular. The earliest Buddhist thinkers took the view that it was only sensible to consider things to exist if they were a particular characteristic or feature of reality that could be distinguished from other particular characteristics.[28] According to this

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[25] *Milinda's Questions,* trans. Isaline B. Horner, London, Luzac, 1963-64, pp.25-28.
[26] Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, p.139.
[27] Ibid., p.136. See also Dan Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology,* RoutledgeCurzon, 2002, p.50.
[28] See Y. Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma: Its Inquiry Into the Nature of Conditioned Reality*. Centre for Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong, 2010, pp.14,15. See also K. L. Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma,* Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong, 2007, p.23.

perspective, the only things that can be said to have any kind of existence must have a defining characteristic in virtue of which their existence can be registered. This can be anything from a distinct phenomenal character to the minutest yet characteristic effect on other phenomena. What cannot exist is something characterless.

We commonly describe entities such as persons and chariots as *having* parts and characteristics. This implies that the entity is something distinct from its parts and characteristics whilst at the same time having no distinct character apart from them. Under analysis, complex entities dissolve into the basic characteristics by which they are recognised and labelled. No chariot or person is ultimately found. In this way, without a particular characteristic to define them, complex entities like persons and chariots cannot be said to ultimately exist. They are simply labels attached to configurations of parts and characteristics, which *do* ultimately exist. These merely labelled configurations are referred to as conventionally real because it is part of everyday convention to speak of chariots and people instead of trying to mention every relevant characteristic or part.

According to this primary principle of Abhidharma analysis, if an object, such as the self or a chariot, can be analysed into multiple elements it does not ultimately exist as one thing. This is the principle used by Nāgasena in order to analyse King Milinda's chariot. Amber Carpenter refers to this as the Chariot Principle and formulates it as follows:

> Whatever has constituents depends upon those constituents for its existence, and depends upon our conceiving this 'many' *as* a 'one' for its unity, and so does not exist ultimately, but only (at best) conventionally.[29]

She also offers the longer formulation:

> Wherever there are 'multiple distinguishable and distinct' properties or parts jointly referred to by a single word, we must identify one or the other constituent as the thing named, *or* discover some separate

[29] Amber D. Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, Durham, Acumen, 2014, p.43.

> entity as the thing named, *or* accept that the name picks out several distinct individuals together, without there being some one thing thus picked out. In every case, the last option will turn out to be the only viable one.[30]

Once the Chariot Principle is applied to everything, the result is a perspective in which the only ultimately real entities would be those basic characteristics or processes that cannot be coherently analysed any further.[31] For example, if water is fluid *and* cold it is not ultimately real. As Carpenter points out, ultimately 'there is an instance of coldness and an instance of fluidity, co-located.' Even coldness and fluidity would turn out to lack ultimate reality if they could be analysed into further distinct aspects.[32] As Mark Siderits explains, 'concepts like that of the chariot and water are aggregative: they involve the mind putting together separate things and then constructing some one thing to hold them all together.'[33] It is for this reason that these entities disappear under analysis, they do not have a distinct nature of their own; they borrow their nature from their constituent features.

The Abhidharma schools produced their own taxonomies of ultimately real, fundamental particulars called *dhammas* (in Pali) or *dharmas* (in Sanskrit). Examples of these include the most basic aggregates such as consciousness and feeling but also such characteristics as 'lightness', 'malleability', and 'agitation'.[34] We do not need to accept the specific taxonomy of any of the Abhidharma schools in order to appreciate the principle involved, which is that to be real is to be a specific, particular something. An unspecific, vague or purely general phenomenon cannot be found anywhere in actual reality. Those phenomena that can be found in reality are particular phenomena. Any such particular will either be analysable into further particulars or it will not. In the case of an analysable phenomenon, its particular nature has been "borrowed"

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[30] Ibid, p.43.
[31] Paul Williams, 'Indian Philosophy', in *Philosophy 2: Further Through The Subject,* A.C. Grayling (ed.), Oxford University Press, 1998, pp.826,827.
[32] Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, pp.43-44.
[33] Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, Hackett Publishing, 2007, p.112.
[34] Buddhaghosa, *Visuddhimagga,* trans. Bhikkhu Nanamoli, Buddhist Publication Society, 2011, p.789.

from the further particulars into which it can be analysed. Such a phenomenon is, on analysis, ultimately found to be *multiple* particulars, which have been taken as one. This is why all analysable phenomena ultimately resolve, under analysis, into further particulars. Thus, according to the principles of Abhidharma methodology, any fundamental constituents of reality must be particulars that are not themselves combinations of further particulars. According to this methodology, these unanalysable particulars, whatever they turn out to be, are dharmas.

If we were to apply the Chariot Principle universally we would find that the fundamental features of reality would have to be absolutely simple characteristics that cannot be analysed into anything further. Insofar as they are understood to be radically simple, a single dharma cannot be said to *possess* features, properties, aspects or abilities. Such a relationship of possession would mean that a dharma could be analysed into, on the one hand, the dharma entity itself, and on the other hand, the features or properties of the dharma entity. Such an entity could not be a dharma because it would be analysable into at least two particulars, the entity *and* its properties. This is why dharmas should not be confused with substances, which are the bearers of properties. As Carpenter points out, 'they *are* their (respective) properties.'[35] A dharma is precisely whatever property or characteristic defines it. For example, if we take lightness to be a dharma, we must consider such a dharma to be a particular instance of lightness. Such an instance both *is* and *does* a particular thing and nothing more. That is to say, a dharma cannot be analysed into, on the one hand, its nature, and on the other hand, its capacity to influence and be influenced by other dharmas. This would make a dharma into two distinct phenomena. Rather, a dharma is an instance, a specific occurrence, a simple event of a particular kind.[36]

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[35] Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, p.44.

[36] For this point I am indebted to Amber D. Carpenter for her lucid account of dharmas given at her talks as part of the EGENIS seminar series at the University of Exeter on the 4th March 2015. See Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, pp.43,44.

Therefore, any given dharma is neither substantial nor enduring. As Siderits explains, 'In the Abhidharma ontology there is no category of substance.'[37] Once we have applied the Chariot Principle, we find that anything with ultimate reality cannot *have* properties nor can such an ultimate *belong* to a characterless substance. Insofar as a substance lacks its own distinct characteristic, it cannot be discovered by analysis. All that can be discovered are the properties or characteristics that the substance supposedly bears. This is why dharmas are atoms 'in the strictest sense'.[38] Even the most basic constituents of matter are not, according to Abhidharma principles, miniscule particles. Even what some Abhidharma systems describe as an 'earth atom *dharma'* is, as Siderits explains, 'just a particular occurrence of solidity.'[39] A dharma is, as Carpenter points out, '*atomos* (indivisible) far more literally than in any ancient Greek atomism, for there are no single bits of reality that have *both* shape *and* size, for instance.'[40]

2.4 Abhidharma Principle II – The Cluster Principle

Both substances and ancient Greek atoms have often been considered to have independent existence, being capable of existing in isolation. In contrast, the complete simplicity of a dharma renders it intrinsically dependent on other dharmas.[41] Even before we reach the level of fundamental dharmas we can recognise the way in which distinct features of reality depend upon others. Were it to be completely isolated, a characteristic such as consciousness or solidity, for example, would lack the required conditions to exist. Consciousness arising in the absence of either an object or reflexivity would not be consciousness *of*

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[37] Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, p.113.
[38] Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, p.44.
[39] Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, p.113.
[40] Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, p.44.
[41] Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, pp.20-22. See also Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, p.259.

anything, not even itself.[42] An instance of solidity without shape would lack any spatial dimensions and so could not be said to occur at all. Our tendency to claim that there must be *something that is solid* rather than *mere solidity* comes from a recognition that solidity must co-arise with a range of other characteristics such as spatial extension.

Despite their distinct natures, both consciousness and solidity require the presence of other characteristics before they can arise. And if consciousness and solidity can be analysed into further characteristics, these more basic constituents would be no less dependent on the presence of additional characteristics. At a certain depth of analysis, the distinct features of reality become so rudimentary that they can only exist in dependence on one another. Given how simple and basic dharmas are supposed to be, we should be able to understand why these would be no less dependent upon one another than distinctive characteristics such as consciousness and solidity. This was recognised within Abhidharma systems in what we can call the Cluster Principle, the recognition that any given dharma must always arise as part of a cluster of mutually dependent factors.[43]

Both the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma systems consider there to be basic mental and physical clusters. The most basic physical clusters include the minimal characteristics required for something physical to exist.[44] The most basic mental clusters include the minimal characteristics required for subjectivity to exist. These factors include consciousness, volition, feeling, and recognition, four of the five aggregates.[45] These four mental aggregates can only arise together because each factor has a particular characteristic that depends on the presence of others.[46] While each of these aggregates can be

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[42] Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, p.76. See also Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, p.275.
[43] Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, p.142.
[44] Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, pp.152-154. See also Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, p.253.
[45] Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, p.69,70. See also Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, pp.282-287.
[46] Gethin, The Foundations of Buddhism, p.211.

found listed as dharmas in some Abhidharma taxonomies, the fact that they always arise together in a cluster does not require that they be simple, unanalysable dharmas.

As we shall see in later chapters, the justification for claiming that the mental aggregates form a cluster of mutually dependent factors relies on their irreducibly subjective character rather than their simplicity. Without the subjective character of consciousness, the particular qualities of an object could not be recognised, nor could there be any feeling or volition in response to that object. Conversely, any specific occurrence of consciousness must always arise with sufficient factors to determine the mode of its engagement with an object. In other words, there must be additional factors that determine *the way in which* consciousness engages with its object.

According to Abhidharma thinking, an instance of object-directed awareness is neither a simple nor a passive phenomenon. A consciousness engages *actively* with its object, reaching out to make contact with it, investigating its nature, recognising its particular phenomenal quality, and then seeking to gain satisfaction from it. The image used in the early Buddhist text *Atthasālinī*, believed to have been written by 5th century commentator Buddhaghosa, is that of a spider responding to a tremor in its web. The spider moves along a thread to where the fly is caught and then feasts on what it finds. Likewise, any occurrence of consciousness involves different phases, which together constitute the engagement of consciousness with an object.[47] Notably, these essential phases of conscious engagement with an object include *recognition*, the factor in virtue of which consciousness engages with the distinctive characteristics of the object.

Furthermore, these phases amount to a drive to reach out, fully apprehend, and "indulge" in the object. In this respect, in its engagement with an object, any occurrence of consciousness involves the will to fully and satisfactorily

[47] Ibid., pp.215, 302.

apprehend its object. Such a claim regarding the wilfulness of consciousness is not limited to early Buddhist philosophy. We can find a similar description of consciousness in the work of Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology: the study of experiences themselves. Husserl explored the concept of intentionality, a term that he appropriated from his teacher Franz Brentano. Intentionality refers to the distinctive way in which consciousness reaches beyond itself and towards its object.[48] For example, to see a cup is not simply to see the side of it that is facing us, rather we take the cup to have unseen sides in the act of apprehending the cup. Husserl describes this as 'a striving, from the very beginning a "driving at" a satisfaction'.[49] This striving character of consciousness, its reaching to achieve satisfaction in a complete apprehension of the object, must involve at least some degree of purpose.

Like the Abhidharma philosophers, Husserl recognised that consciousness arises with a purposive, *volitional* component. And this purposive engagement of consciousness with an object always involves an affective character: the engagement of consciousness with an object involves pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral *feelings*.[50] The drive to reach towards and gain some kind of satisfaction from an object renders the engagement in affective terms depending on how successful it is. And, according to basic Buddhist psychological assumptions, if engagement with an object is unsatisfying or unpleasant, the volitional factors that initially supported this engagement might cease to continue doing so. While any given occurrence of consciousness is purposive in being directed towards a particular object, such an instance will always come to an end. Like the spider moving to feast on a fly caught in a different part of its web, conscious engagement with one object might flow into engagement with a new object. But whether awareness of an object involves sustained engagement or is abandoned in favour of another object, both the

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[48] Joel Krueger, 'Intentionality', *Oxford Handbook of Phenomenological Psychopathology,* eds. Giovanni Stanghellini et. al. Oxford University Press, 2018.

[49] Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic,* trans. A. J. Steinbock, Dortrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001, p.126.

[50] Krueger, 'Intentionality'.

maintenance and transfer of attention on an object involve the same basic striving to achieve a satisfactory, pleasing state of object-apprehension.

From this brief sketch, it has hopefully become somewhat clearer why the Abhidharma systems considered the mental factors of consciousness, recognition, volition, and feeling to form an indivisible cluster of characteristics that always arise together. Each factor in the cluster exists and operates with the others and cannot arise without the others. This state of affairs was taken to be indicative of the way in which the fundamental constituents of reality, dharmas, related to one another. Insofar as consciousness, recognition, feeling, and volition cannot operate without one another, so too must any further factors into which they can be analysed be likewise incapable of arising separately. And just as this would be true of the dharmas that constitute mental factors, so too would all dharmas be incapable of operating or existing without support.

Insofar as a dharma is a completely simple, unanalysable characteristic, it cannot exist on its own. Even in the case of characteristics such as consciousness and solidity, which may in fact be analysable, we can see that it is in their nature to be unable to arise on their own. Consciousness arises as instances of object-awareness.[51] Without the characteristics of which it is conscious, the character of consciousness cannot arise. Similarly, in the case of solidity, a lack of spatial dimensions renders the material characteristic impossible. For there to be an occurrence of solidity or resistance, it must co-arise with another characteristic: spatial extension. In these cases, it is only when they co-arise with other characteristics that consciousness and solidity are able to exist as the particular characteristics that they are. The object of consciousness makes the occurrence of consciousness possible while spatial dimensions make the occurrence of solidity possible.

[51] For my purposes I am considering reflexive self-consciousness as a form of object-consciousness given that it is *consciousness of* consciousness.

Furthermore, such dependent characteristics are also conditioned by the others with which they co-arise. Insofar as a given characteristic cannot arise without others, its very existence as the characteristic that it is requires other characteristics to condition the way that it arises. For example, consciousness of a sunset is not identical to consciousness of birdsong. Although this lack of identity is due to the difference between the objects of consciousness, there is no consciousness that arises separately from an object.[52] There can either be consciousness of one object or consciousness of another. Both occurrences of consciousness are qualitatively distinct in virtue of the difference in the object with which each consciousness arises.

Similarly, using the example of solidity we can recognise that there is no pure solidity, only solidity here or solidity there. The character of solidity is conditioned by its shape just as consciousness is conditioned by its object. Solidity and consciousness are just two examples of the way in which the distinctive characteristics that constitute reality depend upon and condition one another. Solidity is not spatial extension; consciousness is not its object. But solidity must be spatially extended, and consciousness must be conscious *of* something. According to Abhidharma systems, this pattern of distinction and dependence is found throughout reality. Every phenomenon that appears as if it can exist on its own can be analysed into a plurality of distinct characteristics. These characteristics constitute the nature of the apparently self-standing phenomenon, making it what it is. But even at the most fundamental level of reality these distinct characteristics will turn out to be like consciousness and solidity in that no instance of their kind could arise on its own, they can only arise in clusters.

Hopefully it is becoming clear how the Cluster Principle follows from the Chariot Principle. Were we to analyse reality into completely simple characteristics, the very simplicity of these characteristics would be such that the very possibility of

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[52] Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, p.76. See also Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, pp.293-294.

their arising in first place would require other characteristics. Any fundamental characteristic must co-arise with others, forming a cluster of multiple characteristics. Like consciousness and an object, or solidity and spatial extension, characteristics that arise together support one another's existence. Likewise dharmas, being the fundamental characteristics that constitute all phenomena, are understood within Abhidharma systems to arise in clusters. This is also why, according to Abhidharma philosophy, no phenomenon can arise from a single cause nor give rise to a single effect. An event or entity is a short-lived cluster of multiple factors with at least as many proximate causes as factors in its composition.

For example, any occurrence of consciousness cannot be caused merely by a single immediately prior occurrence of consciousness. Insofar as consciousness always has an object, the object of consciousness must also have a cause. But because consciousness is distinct from its object, these two factors must have different preceding causes. Between them, the consciousness factor and the object factor must have at least two causes that worked together to produce consciousness *of* an object. According to Abhidharma principles, causation operates in such a way that 'there is no single or multiple fruit of any kind from a single cause, nor a single fruit from multiple causes, but only multiple fruit from multiple causes.'[53] This is how Buddhaghosa describes the operation of causation in the *Visuddhimagga* or 'Path of Purification', a text summarising Theravāda Buddhist teaching.[54] Not only do dharmas always arise in clusters of multiple mutually dependent factors, they also arise from clusters of multiple causes.

Equally, any event or entity, being a cluster of characteristics, can be expected always to give rise to *multiple* effects. An instance of consciousness cannot produce only a single succeeding instance of consciousness because both instances of consciousness require further factors, such as an object *of*

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[53] Buddhaghosa, *Visuddhimagga,* Chapter XVII, Verse 106, trans. Bhikkhu Nanamoli, Buddhist Publication Society, 2011, p.560.
[54] Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, p.55.

consciousness. Any occurrence of consciousness can only give rise to a future occurrence of consciousness if it does so in concert with another factor that is capable of giving rise to the object of that future consciousness. Neither consciousness nor any other phenomenon, dharma or otherwise, is capable of producing only a single effect. This is why there are no circumstances in which a dharma could arise alone; it will always be caused by, arise with, and give rise to, multiple other factors. In this way the very nature of a dharma depends on its arising with others.

This is also why any particular dharma is understood to be very short lived.[55] Insofar as a particular dharma exists in dependence upon the other dharmas in a cluster, that particular dharma exists for no longer than the cluster of which it is a member. Once the phenomenon of change has been interpreted through the lens of Abhidharma principles we are left with a reality that unfolds and changes due to the arising of dharmas in different clusters at different times. Change would not be possible if all dharmas only ever arose as part of the same cluster. While some dharmas might depend exclusively on a fixed cluster, there must be dharmas that are compatible with a variety of others in order to be able to arise with different clusters at different times. Every example of change can then be understood in terms of characteristics arising and ceasing in different clusters.

For example, a ball that has been thrown across a field can be understood in terms of physical characteristics arising at different locations at different times. Whilst the properties of the ball might remain stable as it moves, from an Abhidharma perspective what is happening is that the types of dharma constituting this object are arising in configuration with different portions of space in different moments.[56] The reason why dharmas are so short-lived is that dharmas are conditioned by the others in their cluster. This means that even an unanalysable characteristic is different depending upon whether it is

[55] Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, pp.44-45.
[56] Ibid., pp.45-46. See also Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, pp.120-123.

arising in one cluster or another. For example, an instance of solidity in its simplest form in one part of space is characteristically the same as an instance in another part of space. But the different positions of these two instances of solidity makes them distinct from one another. As a solid ball moves through the air, solidity arises in different spatial positions and because each of these positions is different, there is a new instance of solidity for each new position.

This is also the case with phenomena such as consciousness. Insofar as a particular occurrence of consciousness is conditioned by its object, an occurrence of consciousness cannot remain the same if the object has changed. Just as consciousness of a red sunset is different from consciousness of birdsong, so too is consciousness of one “tweet” of birdsong distinct from consciousness of a different “tweet”. Any occurrence of consciousness is defined by the particular characteristics that make consciousness what it is, but these particular characteristics exhibit intentionality, meaning that consciousness involves a specific object. Consciousness can only be consciousness if it is consciousness *of* a particular object, and the nature of that object defines what a particular occurrence of consciousness is. This is why a particular occurrence of consciousness lasts only as long as its object remains unchanged. If the object changes, so too does the consciousness.

Furthermore, because every characteristic is conditioned by the others in its cluster, every characteristic is also altered by changes to that cluster’s configuration. In the case of the ball, both the characteristics of the ball itself and those of the space through which it moves are conditioned by its movement. Space occupied by a ball is distinct from space occupied by something else just as a ball in one place is distinct from a ball in another. Throwing a ball conditions the thrower, the ball, and the space through which the ball moves. Any other factors that are dependent upon and responsive to any of the fundamental constituents of the ball, thrower or space will also be conditioned by the throwing.

The ripple of conditioning that emanates from the simple act of throwing a ball would alter every dharma connected to it via the conditioning relationship that exists between these mutually dependent factors. If every instance of change

has the same ripple-effect, the only characteristics that could remain unchanged for more than a moment would be those that are part of clusters that are not dependent upon any outside factors. From an Abhidharma perspective, such self-sufficient clusters would be incapable of change or interaction, making them completely unknowable.[57] What are left are those knowable clusters that change because they are dependent and responsive to external factors. These clusters will be linked to every other via mutually dependent characteristics. As a result, a change anywhere becomes a change everywhere else.

The continual conditioning of dharmas is another reason why they are unlike substances or ancient Greek atoms. Both substances and ancient Greek atoms have often been considered to be the eternal, unchanging reality underlying all change and transformation.[58] In contrast, dharmas, despite their ultimate status, are ephemeral in the extreme. Because a single dharma cannot have multiple characteristics, we cannot say that a single dharma arises in multiple forms or at multiple locations. For example, each arising of solidity in a different location counts as a different dharma with each instance of solidity being conditioned by a different location. Similarly, each arising of consciousness with a different object counts as a different occurrence with each occurrence being conditioned by a different object. If consciousness can be analysed into more basic dharmas, these will be just as ephemeral as the changing phenomenon into which they are configured. In this way, the conditioning of any distinct characteristic over time provides the basis for claiming that there is not a single enduring characteristic but rather a series of subtly different ones.

We can understand how the ephemeral nature of dharmas follows from the Chariot Principle when we apply it to time. Any entity can be analysed in terms of time just as it can be analysed in terms of space. A chariot can be analysed spatially into its wheels, which are beneath its framework, which is behind its

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[57] See Perrett, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, p.144.
[58] Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, pp.209,210.

reins, and so on. It can also be analysed temporally into, for example, its construction phase, its first journey, second journey, and so on. The chariot has no existence aside from its occurrence at these times. And because the chariot cannot be found under analysis, its dependence on temporal parts ultimately applies to its fundamental constituents, the dharmas of which it is a configuration. The chariot is ultimately dependent upon and analysable into every instance of every particular characteristic that constitutes its occurrence as the thing that it is. This means that the occurrence of a particular characteristic over time can be analysed into distinct instances of a particular type of characteristic arising.

Therefore, a single dharma, being completely simple, is an instance of a particular unanalysable characteristic. Where there are two instances of a single type of characteristic, our ability to recognise them as different instances lets on that they cannot be a single dharma. If the continual arising of dharmas in different clusters has a rippling conditioning effect on every other dharma, it follows that each dharma lasts no longer than the time it takes to be conditioned in a particular way. Once the specific conditioning factors change, the dharma in question can no longer be said to exist. What arises in its place is a dharma of the same type that is conditioned differently. The consequence of applying both the Chariot and Cluster Principles to everything, including time, is that no dharma can last for longer than a moment.[59] This is why, from the perspective of Abhidhamma principles, every new moment brings a whole new world constituted by new dharmas.

However, if the fresh arising of new dharmas in every moment amounted to the appearance of novel or unprecedented dharmas, the world could not possibly

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[59] Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, pp.44-45. The precise meaning of this point of Abhidharma philosophy was contested by different schools. According to the Sautrāntika School, a moment was a temporal point without duration while for the Sarvāstivāda School, the duration of a moment could be calculated. See Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, pp.219-223. For their part, the Theravāda school was less committal on the fundamental ontology of a moment in that they understood dharmas to occur over the course of a number of phased moments in which they arise, exist, and then cease. See Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma,* p.249.

make sense. If it were possible for a completely unprecedented characteristic to arise, the chances of continuity between even two consecutive moments would be implausibly remote. This is why dharmas are not just momentary, they are also serial. There is no type of dharma that arises only once. Any dharma is always preceded by a dharma of the same type just as it is also succeeded by a dharma of the same type.[60] This is true not just of dharmas but also of any indivisible clusters in which they continually arise. To use our previous examples, if solidity or consciousness are configurations of fundamental characteristics that cannot arise separately, any occurrence of solidity or consciousness will be preceded and followed by further occurrences of these same types of characteristic. In this case neither solidity nor consciousness can be said to arise just a few times and then never again. For such an unprecedented arising of characteristics to be possible would mean that in any moment an infinite number of unprecedented characteristics could appear. The repeated arising of a comprehensible world in every moment makes such a hypothesis incredible in the extreme.

2.5 Abhidharma Principle III – The Continuity Principle

It is due to the absurdity that results from allowing for the possibility of unprecedented characteristics that one of the core principles of the Abhidharma approach is the Continuity Principle.[61] Once we have used the Chariot Principle to undermine the idea that the world is full of substances or entities, the full

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[60] Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, pp.224-225. As Dhammajoti notes, there was some disagreement as to whether this was true only for mental dharmas such as consciousness and not for physical ones like solidity. For simplicity's sake I will present it as holding true for all dharmas. The Theravāda Abhidhamma presents it as holding true for mental dharmas only, see Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, pp.267-8.

[61] Unlike the Chariot and Cluster Principles, which I am using to summarise the Abhidharma approach, the Continuity Principle is mentioned in the Abhidhamma text as one of the conditions for the arising of dharmas. In the Theravāda Abhidhamma it is referred to as *Anantara-Paccaya,* literally meaning the Uninterruptedness Condition or *Samanantara-Paccaya* meaning contiguity or immediate condition. See Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, p.267. See also Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, p.224.

absurdity of assuming that fundamental characteristics can completely appear or disappear is revealed. Objects such as persons and chariots change over time, picking up and dropping certain characteristics depending on their context. If we think that entities like chariots are ultimately real and that their properties are merely their aspects, the fact that a chariot gains and loses properties such as speed, efficiency or colour does not seem problematic. If properties are simply ways for an object to exist, they can appear and disappear without really changing the stuff that exists. The problem is when the chariot falls apart. This is when we begin to wonder what happened to its essence.

Nevertheless, it seems obvious that the chariot is no more, it has ceased to be. Suddenly annihilation seems very real. Equally, the production of artefacts and the birth of people makes the creation of completely new and unique entities seem commonplace. The ease with which we can observe the creation and destruction of objects combined with our inability to recognise the continuity of the most fundamental characteristics that constitute them makes change appear to be an interplay of creation and destruction rather than the constant reconfiguration of fundamental constituents. Once we apply the Chariot Principle, the demotion of objects to conventional status and the elevation of mere properties to ultimate status makes creation and annihilation much less plausible. The disintegration of constructed phenomena becomes inevitable while the creation and annihilation of the fundamental features of reality becomes not only deeply absurd but completely unjustified.

For example, let us consider features of reality such as solidity or the subjective characteristics of consciousness. Insofar as these characteristics are distinctive, there must be fundamental features of reality that make them the way that they are. Instances of solidity or consciousness could not be said to simply appear or disappear without remainder because the fundamental features that constitute them must be preceded and succeeded by features of the same type. This condition must be accepted unless we are able to make sense of a world in which unprecedented, completely unpredictable fundamental features of reality can appear at any time. This is why, according to Abhidharma principles, any fundamental feature of reality must be preceded

and followed by another of the same type. This is one way in which the Continuity Principle follows from the Chariot Principle.

Another way in which the Continuity Principle follows from the Chariot Principle is that, at the most fundamental level of reality, the creation and annihilation of phenomena must be impossible. Complex objects such as persons and chariots can be created and destroyed through gradual stages of development and dissolution. But, being complex, these are not fundamental phenomena. In contrast, the fundamental constituents of reality cannot develop or dissolve. Whether they are absolutely simple unanalysable dharmas or indivisible clusters of dharmas, the fundamental features of reality cannot appear part by part. This is because dharmas have no parts and indivisible clusters consist of factors that cannot arise on their own.

If we were to believe that the creation and destruction of dharmas or indivisible clusters *was* possible, we would have to believe that such creation or destruction occurred instantaneously. Dharmas and indivisible clusters cannot emerge gradually because they either exist as the characteristics that they are or otherwise they cannot exist at all. For example, if there is a dharma of solidity or if the most fundamental form of solidity is a cluster of inseparable characteristics then either there is an instance of such solidity or there is not. Even if we accept that solidity comes in degrees, the weakest form of solidity is still characteristically solid in some sense. In order for even the weakest form of solidity to appear it would have to do so all at once. There would have to be a single instant in which solidity in such a fundamental form was created or annihilated.

However, the *instantaneous* arising of *any* phenomenon requires there to be such a thing as a *single temporal instant.* If we were to believe that the creation and destruction of dharmas or indivisible clusters *was* possible, we would have to believe that such creation or destruction occurred *within* such a temporal instant. But if such an instant had a duration, its duration would render it analysable into temporal parts or phases. If the type of creation or annihilation that we are considering is not gradual, it can only take place in one of these phases, it cannot occur gradually over the course of more than one phase. In

this case, the phases of an instant would have to be durationless, otherwise they too could be analysed into further phases. Eventually we would require an unanalysable temporal instant in which the creation or annihilation takes place. Such an instant would by necessity lack duration and so would amount to an interstice or break in the occurrence of events. And yet, without having any duration whatsoever, such interstices cannot be said to occur *within time* at all.

The conclusion drawn within most Abhidharma systems was that there cannot be breaks or interstices between the end of one event and the beginning of another. This conclusion follows from the foundational Buddhist approach to time, found in the earliest scriptures, in which there is 'no moment, no instant, no particle of time when the river [of time] stops flowing.'[62] Because each fundamental unit of time is always already flowing into the next, we cannot find a break in the continuous flow of time. In the *Visuddhimagga,* Buddhaghosa attempts to illustrate this situation by likening each moment in time to a single point on the rim of a constantly rolling wheel.[63] In order for the wheel to keep rolling, no point on its rim can remain touching the same point on the ground. In fact, each point must already be leaving the ground as soon as it touches it in order for the wheel to be constantly turning. In this way, unless we think that time occasionally stops, we must approach the flow of events as completely uninterrupted.

Therefore, if we were to believe that the creation and destruction of dharmas or indivisible clusters *was* possible, we would have to also believe that there are durationless temporal instants. These unanalysable durationless instants would be particles of time in which the flow of events was interrupted. But such a belief would be incompatible with Abhidharma principles as well as being highly problematic on its own terms. If time were to *stop* flowing, how could an event ever occur that would *start* it again? We should reject such a belief and accept

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[62] From the *Anguttara Nikaya* (4.137)*,* quoted in Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, p.234.

[63] Buddhaghosa, *Visuddhimagga,* Chapter VIII, Verse 39, trans. Bhikkhu Nanamoli, Buddhist Publication Society, 2011, p. 233.

that even if we analysed every phenomenon into the briefest occurrences of the most fundamental characteristics, we would find no interruption in the flow of conditioning that brings one occurrence to an end and commences the next.

Moreover, this uninterruptedness in the flow of events holds at every level of reality. Between the arising of the ball in one spatial position and its arising in a different spatial position there is no break in which the ball did not occupy any position at all. Likewise, between the arising of consciousness of a particular object and the arising of the following instance of consciousness, there is no point in time at which there is no consciousness at all. The fundamental characteristics that constitute consciousness cannot cease altogether. According to the Continuity Principle, wherever we find a conscious being, we can expect each instance of the subjective characteristics that constitute their consciousness to be followed without interruption by succeeding instances of those same types of subjective characteristic. In this way, one configuration of factors flows uninterruptedly into the next, forming an unbroken continuity between any given dharma and those that precede and succeed it. There is no gap in the stream of a particular type of dharma's arising; one instance is immediately followed by another of the same type. There is no point in time at which a completely new type of dharma could arise. Nor is there a point at which the arising of dharmas stops. In this way, adopting the Continuity Principle commits one to the view that any fundamental characteristic is always immediately preceded and succeeded by another of the same type.

2.6 Conclusion

In enumerating the key principles of Abhidharma analysis, my aim is to provide a few core premises that would be recognised and supported by the earliest Buddhist philosophers. Despite the historical debates that took place between the adherents of different Abhidharma systems, I believe that what I have referred to as the Chariot, Cluster, and Continuity Principles were adhered to by most interlocutors in these debates.

Furthermore, it is through the force of these principles that Dharmakīrti is able to reach his conclusion. If we accept Dharmakīrti's premise that there is something distinctive about conscious events, it follows from Abhidharma principles that either there must be a number of fundamental characteristics that constitute this distinctiveness or else consciousness must be an unanalysable dharma. Even if consciousness is analysable into distinct features or aspects, a case can be made, based on the cluster principle, for the inseparability of the core characteristics of consciousness. From here an argument against the unprecedented appearance of these core characteristics as well as an argument against the possibility of their dispersal and annihilation would allow us to conclude that there must always be a previous occurrence of consciousness just as it must also continue occurring in future. If reasons can be given for believing that consciousness is either unanalysable or constituted by inseparable factors and also that the distinct characteristics of each event are reproduced in future events, reasons can be given to support the idea that consciousness, being one of these events, arises in a continual unbroken stream.[64]

Therefore, if a case can be made for these key Abhidharma principles, this will strengthen the case for the Buddhist multi-life perspective according to which a cohesive, if minimal, form of subjectivity continues indefinitely into the future regardless of the presence or absence of the physical characteristics of the body. Throughout one's life, the mental factors recurrently combine with bodily processes, the physical factor. When the body dies this psycho-physical combination stops arising but this does not stop the uninterrupted series of mental events. If we can offer strong reasons, accessible to Buddhists and non-Buddhist alike, to consider these principles to be sound, secular mindfulness practitioners would have reasons to take arguments for rebirth seriously.

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[64] Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, pp.267, 268. See also Hayes, 'Dharmakīrti on Punarbhava', p.121.

3. Reviewing the Situation: Rebirth in Contemporary Philosophy

3.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this project is to investigate whether a philosophical argument can be provided for the multi-life perspective that would be compatible with the core commitments found in the earliest Buddhist philosophical systems whilst also being accessible and persuasive to modern audiences. It is the purpose of this chapter to survey some of the works of scholarship that have evaluated Buddhist ideas and the arguments and assumptions behind them. What should emerge is something of an overview of how the Buddhist multi-life hypothesis has been approached in philosophical works that have sought justification for key Buddhist ideas.

As has already been shown, there is a tendency for modern engagements with Buddhism to overlook, dismiss or otherwise side-line its traditional multi-life perspective according to which consciousness continues across multiple lives of birth, death, and rebirth. A ready example would be the work of Stephen Batchelor, who has developed an interpretation of Buddhism that is increasingly dismissive of its traditional multi-life perspective. Between his earlier *Buddhism without Beliefs* and the later *After Buddhism*, Batchelor's views have shifted from a sceptical agnosticism regarding claims about rebirth to outright dismissal of them. Even in *Buddhism without Beliefs,* Batchelor describes the historical debates between different schools regarding the nature of rebirth as examples of the kind of unprovable metaphysical speculation that the Buddha rejected.[1] He does not entertain the possibility that these debates took place from a common basis of genuine insight and that the interlocutors in such debates had strong reasons to believe that rebirth takes place but sought further clarity regarding its details. Even in this earlier agnostic phase, Batchelor is decisive

[1] Stephen Batchelor, *Buddhism without Beliefs*, Penguin Publishing Group, 1998, p.36.

in his dismissal of rebirth and does not wish to spend too much time on it in his presentation of Buddhism.

However, it is important to clarify that a good deal of the debate regarding the plausibility of the Buddhist multi-life perspective takes place within different kinds of literature, not all of it scholarship in the usual sense of the word. Batchelor's work, for example, does not represent the work of a Buddhist scholar in the conventional sense. Given his long training in the Tibetan tradition, Batchelor has not followed the usual academic route of obtaining educational degrees and academic research posts. This does not, of course, reduce the value of Batchelor's work but rather helps to demonstrate the way in which his attempts at founding a secular school of Buddhism are distinct from most works of mainstream academic Buddhist scholarship. Batchelor's engagement with Buddhism differs from the great deal of modern exegetical scholarship that does not seek to impose a modernist interpretation on the central aspects of Buddhism.

Examples of this kind of conventional Buddhist scholarship include but are not limited to Bhikkhu Bodhi's *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*; Rupert Gethin's *The Foundations of Buddhism* or his article 'Bhavaṅga and Rebirth According to the Abhidhamma'; Y. Karunadasa's *The Theravāda Abhidhamma: Its Inquiry Into the Nature of Conditioned Reality;* K. L. Dharmajoti's exploration of the *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*; Robert Thurman's *Essential Tibetan Buddhism*; and Walpola Rahula's *What The Buddha Taught*. Such brilliant research aims to accurately represent the way in which Buddhism has been understood and practised in various traditions. Such research makes clear reference to the traditional cosmology in which rebirth is a key factor.

Nevertheless, being exegetical in nature, these works of Buddhist scholarship do not attempt to explore the philosophical justification for the multi-life perspective. Although Robert Thurman's *Infinite Life* constitutes an example of a Buddhist scholar advocating the multi-life perspective, only a few pages are spent briefly defending the belief. On the whole, scholars whose primary role is to provide exegesis and interpretation of Buddhist ideas tend not to engage in philosophical arguments about the truth of these ideas. Here there is an

interesting contrast with Christian scholarship, in which there is a long tradition of Christian theologians attempting to provide philosophical defences of Christian doctrine. Contemporary Buddhist scholarship lacks this sort of tradition. Almost twenty years ago, an attempt at remedying this absence was made in the edited volume *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections By Contemporary Buddhist Scholars* but this did not lead to a burgeoning tradition of Buddhist scholars expounding and defending Buddhist doctrines.[2] One of the key concerns raised regarding the very idea of a "Buddhist" Theology was the fundamentally Christian structure of theology as a discipline. Richard Payne provided an argument to this end in a keynote address in August of 2011. His ultimate concern was that theology developed in response to Christian Europeans' growing awareness of the plurality of religious belief across the world. Theology was developed as the discipline aimed at demonstrating the superiority of Christianity and staving off doubt in the face of multiple faiths. Buddhism, as Payne points out, developed amongst diverse religions from the beginning and also developed *into* diverse traditions. The desire to subsume all religious belief into a single unified church was never a major aspect of the development of Buddhism as it was in Christianity. This is why Payne considers it inappropriate to develop a tradition of Buddhist Theology.[3]

However, insofar as it developed amongst other beliefs and practices, Buddhist thought and practice could not avoid developing a critical, philosophically argumentative dimension. It might, as Payne suggests, be a mistake to refer to this aspect of Buddhism as a kind of "theology" but this does not reduce the need for some degree of critical engagement with those countervailing viewpoints that contradict Buddhism's foundational ideas and practices. If there is nothing that even approximates a theological tradition within *contemporary*

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[2] See *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections By Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, Roger R. Jackson and John J. Makransky, (eds.), Richmond, Curzon, 2000.

[3] See Richard K. Payne, 'Why "Buddhist Theology" Is Not a Good Idea: Keynote Address for the Fifteenth Biennial Conference of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies, Kyoto, August 2011', *The Pure Land: Journal of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies,* Vol.1, No.27, 2013, pp.37-72.

Buddhist scholarship, the job of engaging in arguments about the plausibility of traditional Buddhist ideas is left to contemporary philosophers. Such a situation does not bode well for the traditional Buddhist cosmological framework insofar as contemporary western philosophers engaging with Buddhism have not been particularly open to the claim that consciousness continues and is reborn after death. This is largely due to a strong underlying assumption shared by a great many contemporary philosophers of mind. Despite ongoing philosophical debate regarding the exact relationship between minds, brains and the world, the view that whatever consciousness turns out to be it ceases when the body dies seems to be a fixed assumption. That most philosophers are committed to this assumption becomes apparent when a particular number of them show interest in an area of argument in which this assumption should at least be questioned.

In *Real Materialism,* for example, Galen Strawson argues that it is most reasonable to assume that conscious experience exists throughout the physical world. Adopting this position, Strawson suggests that there are subjective experiences that exist outside of living organisms but does not explore what happens to our own subjective experiences once they are no longer part of our living body.[4] And Strawson is not alone. There is also an increasing amount of work that explores some of the serious philosophical problems facing the mainstream physicalist approach to consciousness in which it is a by-product of physical processes. Recent examples of this work include Philip Goff's *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality* and Howard Robinson's *From the Knowledge Argument to Mental Substance.*[5]

Nevertheless, within contemporary philosophical debate as a whole, the view that whatever consciousness turns out to be it is a process that ceases when the physical body dies remains the dominant assumption. This assumption

[4]See Galen Strawson, 'Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism', in *Real Materialism and other essays,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, pp.71-73.

[5] See Philip Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality*, Oxford University Press, 2017, and Howard Robinson, *From the Knowledge Argument to Mental Substance*, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

rarely faces a direct challenge by those philosophers who are either challenging the plausibility of physicalism or otherwise redefining the physical away from the Cartesian assumption that it lacks any subjective or experiential qualities. When it comes to the possibility of individual consciousness existing after death, it seems that most contemporary western philosophers have made up their minds regarding the plausibility and importance of this issue. It is notable that when David Bourget and David Chalmers surveyed philosophers on their beliefs there were questions on whether they believed in God, whether they were physicalist or non-physicalist about the mind, and also on what constitutes personal identity, but nowhere was there a question on the possibility of life after death.[6] The question on whether they believe they would survive teleportation has certain similarities but it is nonetheless clear that the question of whether there is something personal or subjective that survives death is being neglected within philosophy. One gets the impression that most contemporary western philosophers either have no interest in addressing this question or otherwise have made up their minds that subjective experiences simply do not continue after death.

3.2 Buddhism in Contemporary Philosophical Discussion

There is also an increasing number of works rooted in the western philosophical tradition that seek to explore Buddhist philosophy or make use of Buddhist ideas in order to explore the nature of mind and world.[7] But what is conspicuously missing from many of these explorations of Buddhist accounts

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[6] See David Bourget and David J. Chalmers, 'What do philosophers believe?', *Philosophical Studies,* pp.465-500, Vol. 64, Issue 3, September, 2014.

[7] See John Pickering, 'The self as a semiotic process', in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, pp.31-47, Vol. 6, No.4, April 1999, and Dan Zahavi, 'The Experiential Self: Objections and Clarifications', in Siderits, M., Thompson, E., and Zahavi, D. (eds), *Self, No Self?: Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions*, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp.56-76. See also Matthew MacKenzie, 'Enacting the Self: Buddhist and Enactivist Approaches to the Emergence of the Self', in *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences,* Vol. 9, No. 1, 1st March, 2010, pp.75–99.

of consciousness is the traditional Buddhist claim that consciousness is continuously reproduced even beyond death.[8]

An increasing number of philosophers trained in the western tradition have engaged with Buddhist philosophical arguments and approaches in a way that demonstrates their relevance. Much of this work focusses on elucidating the key Buddhist arguments for distinct views regarding the self and reality. These works include, among many others, Paul Williams' *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations, Altruism and Reality: Studies in the Bodhicaryāvatāra* or his paper 'Abhidharma Ontology'; Amber Carpenter's *Indian Buddhist Philosophy;* Mark Siderits' *Buddhism as Philosophy;* Jay Garfield's *Empty Words;* Dan Lusthaus' *Buddhist Phenomenology;* and Miri Albahari's *Analytical Buddhism: The Two-Tiered Illusion of Self.*

There are also those philosophical works that make use of Buddhist philosophical ideas in order to address contemporary philosophical discussions around the nature and reality of the self. Examples include John Pickering's article 'The Self as a semiotic process' and the volume *Self, No Self?* edited and contributed to by Mark Siderits, Evan Thompson and Dan Zahavi. These are examples of excellent work in which Buddhist analyses of the self, approaches to change and also psychological categories have been borrowed and explored as ways to approach and perhaps answer questions within the philosophy of mind and self.[9] These excellent philosophical engagements with Buddhism do not, however, explore in any detail the arguments that have been presented in defence of rebirth. Any mention of the traditional Buddhist claim that consciousness is continuously reproduced even beyond death is often minimal or even absent from philosophical engagement with Buddhism.

That said, we do find an extended discussion between Paul Williams and Mark Siderits in the third issue of *Philosophy East and West*, Volume 50. This

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[8] See Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp.3,215-218.
[9] See Note 7.

discussion begins with Siderits' review of Williams' *Altruism and Reality* and develops into a dialogue that centres primarily on self-interest in Buddhist philosophy with reference to rebirth. What becomes clear in this argument is that neither Williams nor Siderits considered rebirth to be particularly important to the Buddhist practitioner. Siderits considers the relevance of rebirth primarily in terms of its potential to reduce conventionally immoral behaviour in a culture 'that supports belief in karma and rebirth'.[10] Williams states that the tendency for Buddhists, in practice, to consider themselves to be reborn is 'a confusion'.[11] Therefore, despite tackling aspects of rebirth in their discussion, both Williams and Siderits show some ambivalence regarding its importance or validity.

On the whole, contemporary philosophical works on Buddhism tend to avoid addressing cosmological aspects of Buddhism, instead maintaining a focus on arguments regarding the nature of consciousness, the self, and objects in the world. These sorts of arguments are those that have clear parallels in contemporary metaphysics and the philosophy of mind. In contrast, Buddhist claims about the continuity of consciousness after death do not find a clear parallel in contemporary philosophical debates. The dearth of interest in questions about the potential survival of consciousness after death within contemporary metaphysics and philosophy of mind precludes the cosmological aspect of Buddhism from being discussed in detail by the philosophers who are interested in Buddhism. Claims about the afterlife are generally dealt with by philosophers or scholars of religion and theology. For this reason, rebirth is generally subtracted from the category of Buddhist philosophy and placed in the "Buddhism-as-a-religion" bin.[12]

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[10] Mark Siderits, 'The Reality of Altruism: Reconstructing Śāntideva', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 50, No. 3, July 2000, p.415.

[11] Paul Williams, 'Response to Mark Siderits' Review', *Philosophy East and West,* Vol. 50, No. 3, July 2000, p.428.

[12] See David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp.6-9. See also Antoine Panaïoti, *Nietzsche and Buddhist Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp.9-12. For a sustained attack on this claim see Owen Flanagan, *The Bodhisattva's Brain: Buddhism Naturalized*, MIT Press, 2011.

A clear example of this is found in Antoine Panaïoti's *Nietzsche and Buddhist Philosophy,* an otherwise brilliant exploration of the relationship between the ethical systems presented within the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and the teachings of the Buddha. Panaïoti makes it abundantly clear from the outset that he will not be addressing the beliefs of traditional Buddhists but only the therapeutic practices that the Buddha taught for living well in this life.[13] In this way he adopts the view that the Buddha's claims about the afterlife are not relevant to the therapeutic practices that he also taught. This approach leaves unquestioned the assumption that Buddhism consists of a legitimately philosophical and practical side on the one hand and a culturally embedded, superstitious and faith-based dimension on the other. This is an imposed partition that is not found in Buddhist traditions. The partitioning of Buddhist philosophical ideas and Buddhist religious doctrines encourages the view that while traditional Buddhist thought can make important contributions to philosophical discussions around the self and consciousness, it is blinkered by religious convictions when it comes to approaching death.

3.3 Rebirth in Contemporary Philosophical Discussion

It would, however, be untrue to say that there is *no* work being done that explores Buddhist philosophical arguments for rebirth. We can indeed find examples of philosophical engagements with the Buddhist arguments that have been made in defence of the multi-life perspective.

For in-depth analyses of these arguments we can look to work such as Richard Hayes' article 'Dharmakīrti on Punarbhava'; Roy Perrett's *Death and Immortality* or his article 'Rebirth'; Paul Griffiths' *On Being Mindless;* Dan Arnold's *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing;* or Mikel Burley's *Rebirth and the Stream of Life* and his article 'Reincarnation and the Lack of Imagination in

[13] Antoine Panaïoti, *Nietzsche and Buddhist Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp.9-14.

Philosophy'. But what none of these works does is engage with the key principles behind the arguments for rebirth and see how they might offer support where the traditional arguments are weak. There is no attempt to set up a discussion in which the traditional Buddhist is offered the contemporary philosophical tools to persuade an unconvinced audience to take the multi-life perspective seriously.

For example, of the works mentioned, Hayes, Perrett and Griffiths present the arguments that are to be found in the history of Buddhist philosophy and provide some comments on how persuasive a contemporary audience might find these arguments. The aim of these works is simply to present the historical arguments rather than to develop those arguments in the light of contemporary challenges. In this way they do not set out to develop a dialogue between contemporary and traditional Buddhist thought. Arnold's *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing* is slightly different. Arnold examines Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth and brings it into dialogue with contemporary arguments in philosophy of mind.

However, Arnold's primary goal is to demonstrate how certain features of Dharmakīrti's argument are common to Jerry Fodor's contemporary argument for a physicalist approach to mental states. Both Dharmakīrti and Fodor attempt to explain mental states, particularly beliefs, in causal terms that are incapable of making sense of how beliefs can be *about* anything. Arnold's key aim is to criticise Dharmakīrti's approach to the mental on the grounds that our ability to understand the meaningfulness of statements as well as our responsiveness to reasons (as opposed to mere stimuli) cannot be accounted for in purely causal terms. Arnold's work does much to elucidate the intricacies of ancient Indian argument and their relevance to recent developments in philosophy of mind and language. It is not, however, clear where his discussion leaves us with regard to the central argument for rebirth that Arnold is examining. Rather than weighing in on the overall plausibility of rebirth, Arnold is simply critiquing

Dharmakīrti's attempt to understand the mental in purely causal terms on the grounds that this is something which physicalists generally try to do.[14]

Mikel Burley's work is similar to Arnold's in that his key focus is not on arguments for rebirth themselves but rather on related issues. In Burley's case it is the relationship between rebirth beliefs and the ways of life in which these beliefs are embedded. He expertly brings Wittgenstein's thought to bear on the issue of rebirth and in doing so presents belief in rebirth as inextricably linked to ethics and to a certain 'form of life'.[15] Burley argues that metaphysical questions about whether or not rebirth takes place cannot be separated from the moral vision that is enabled by talk of rebirth. Burley offers a fascinating exploration of the variety of rebirth beliefs in cultures that span the entire globe, from Asia to Africa to the Americas. In doing so he offers a powerful challenge to those western philosophers who have dismissed rebirth, somewhat lazily, without examining the particular views of those for whom rebirth is a feature of their world. Burley's work does not aim to make a case for the plausibility of rebirth for a contemporary non-Buddhist audience. Rather, he argues for the inseparability of belief in rebirth and the way of life in which this belief lives and breathes.

The works mentioned here take arguments for rebirth as primarily interesting for cultural, ethical, or scholarly reasons rather than as potentially persuasive to contemporary audiences. There is a risk here that this lack of dialogue between contemporary thought and Buddhist arguments for rebirth presents the multi-life perspective as something that cannot actually stand-up to the kind of scrutiny that contemporary secular audiences would subject it to. For some contemporary philosophers engaging with Buddhism, this is entirely the case, belief in rebirth simply does not survive critical appraisal. The most striking example of a philosophical engagement with Buddhism that vehemently rejects

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[14] Dan Arnold, *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing,* New York, Columbia University Press, 2012, pp.6-14.

[15] Mikel Burley, *Rebirth and the Stream of Life*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, p.99.

rebirth in this way is Owen Flanagan's *The Bodhisattva's Brain: Buddhism Naturalized.*

3.4 Owen Flanagan's The Bodhisattva's Brain

Flanagan's work attempts to offer an interpretation of Buddhism that is compatible with naturalism, a worldview that he admits is vague but can be taken to be the rejection of belief in anything that could be described as supernatural: rebirths, heavens, hells, creator gods, miracles and so on.[16] For naturalists, the things that happen in the world are best understood in terms of 'causes that have revealed themselves both to exist and to possess actual causal powers that could explain the phenomena'.[17] Flanagan seems to be referring predominantly to the kinds of causes for which there is scientific, and perhaps philosophical, evidence. He asserts: 'World historical evidence suggests that naturalism, vague as it is, keeps being vindicated'.[18] This process of vindication seems to consist in the capacity for scientific theories to explain more and more features of the world to such an extent that positing causes like miracles, afterlives and gods becomes an unnecessary extravagance. Flanagan claims that, in light of this evidence, it is most reasonable to assume that when all the scientific evidence has come in, no supernatural term will be needed to explain anything. In his words naturalism is 'a good bet'.[19]

The weakness of Flanagan's approach is the way in which the term naturalism is stretched to include a rejection of belief in anything non-physical. For example, he places the possibility of a non-physical consciousness on the same scale of radical supernaturalism as 'miracles' and 'evil spirits'. Being a naturalist, for Flanagan, seems to require being a physicalist. This precludes the possibility that a Buddhist might believe that consciousness is non-physical

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[16] Owen Flanagan, *The Bodhisattva's Brain: Buddhism Naturalized*, MIT Press, 2011, p.2.
[17] Ibid., p.5.
[18] Ibid., p.2.
[19] Ibid., p.2.

whilst at the same time being considered a naturalist. Many Buddhists seem to be quite comfortable believing that their claims about the rebirth of a non-physical consciousness in line with karmic laws are true and that scientific evidence will eventually validate such teachings. Nothing about this idea seems obviously problematic. What Flanagan fails to deal with is the possibility that, while the natural sciences might come to explain everything in the world, scientific theories will nevertheless have to undergo revisions in order to accomplish this feat. Scientific revolutions of this kind have occurred throughout the history of science and it requires a leap of faith to assume that there will be no more such revisions to scientific orthodoxy. The Buddhist view is simply that twenty-five centuries of investigation by Buddhist practitioners of consciousness and its nature has given them the "inside scoop" so to speak.[20]

However, the strength of Flanagan's approach is that he does engage with Buddhist beliefs, particularly about consciousness, and clarifies the key problems they encounter when subjected to the standards to which scientific theories are held. Such theories require support from robust evidence gathered using a scientific methodology that renders the evidence admissible. Insofar as they have not been supported by anything that Flanagan would recognise as admissible evidence, the Buddha's teachings on karma, rebirth, heaven and hells realms are written off as 'mind-numbing and wishful hocus-pocus'.[21] The following passage is a clear illustration of how Flanagan sees such teachings in the light of his naturalising project:

> I am trying to provide a picture of Buddhism that could appeal to scientific naturalists, and both concepts [nirvana and rebirth] are notoriously unscientific, non-naturalistic. It is well known in anthropology and psychology that humans relish positive illusions and death-defying myths, especially ones that involve afterlives where karmic justice is doled out – and this despite the utter

[20] See B. Alan Wallace, *Hidden Dimensions: The Unification of Physics and Consciousness*, Columbia University Press, 2013, 58-69.
[21] Flanagan, *The Bodhisattva's Brain*, 2011, p.3.

> incredibility, the complete epistemic unrespectability of such beliefs.[22]

For Flanagan, a ‘tamed’ version of Buddhism must conform to the naturalistic view of the world and must therefore dispense with belief in a non-physical mental continuum that spans multiple lives. It is this belief that Flanagan perceives as particularly untamed due to the fact that it requires that consciousness can exist independently of a living brain and so is presumably non-physical despite being able to produce physical effects. For Flanagan, this is unreasonable because our entire scientific understanding of the world is predicated on the laws of thermodynamics, most notably that energy can neither be created nor destroyed.

As a result, our conscious experiences must either be part of the physical make-up of the nervous system or otherwise must remain epiphenomenal, unable to produce any kinds of physical effects. In this case the mental continuum would remain impotent with regard to the physical world. Our being conscious would have no effect on our actions. Emotions and sensations, which seem to require at least some degree of consciousness, would play no part in motivating our actions, rather they would simply be ‘akin to a press release about what the body is going to do’.[23] Maintaining that there is a non-physical mental continuum but that it cannot produce effects in the physical world would create severe problems for any belief that our mind plays a causal role in our actions. Flanagan’s claim is that, in order for consciousness to produce physical effects, it is most plausible to assume that it exists in virtue of the physical processes realised in our brains. Therefore, we have no respectable reason to believe that, once our brain processes cease, there will be any more mental events for us.

Flanagan’s work is perhaps the foremost example of an attempt to directly address the multi-life perspective in order to eliminate it from the Buddhist

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[22] Ibid., p.22.
[23] Ibid., p.66.

worldview. The approach Flanagan takes in *The Bodhisattva's Brain* has also been largely accepted by many of his critics. For example, in Charles Goodman's article 'Buddhism, Naturalism, and the Pursuit of Happiness', he offers a response to Flanagan's rejection of rebirth. While this response denies that the Buddhist doctrine of no-self is incompatible with rebirth, he does agree that rebirth is implausible. On the whole, Goodman accepts from the outset the separation of Buddhism into 'mythic' and 'naturalised' aspects, with rebirth being well and truly on the mythic side of this divide.

However, strong resistance to the physicalist approach to Buddhism and consciousness exemplified in *The Bodhisattva's Brain* can be found in the work of B. Alan Wallace. In *Choosing Reality: A Buddhist View of Physics and the Mind, The Taboo of Subjectivity : Towards a New Science of Consciousness,* and *Hidden Dimensions: The Unification of Physics and Consciousness,* Wallace argues that consciousness is fundamental to reality in a way that mainstream naturalism denies. The *Taboo of Subjectivity* offers a brilliant exploration of the ways in which a commitment to approaching phenomena from a third-person perspective within scientific methodology has resulted in many western philosophers and scientists failing to deal effectively with the first-personal nature of consciousness. In both *Choosing Reality* and *Hidden Dimensions*, Wallace explores developments in quantum physics in order to demonstrate that consciousness is central to the development of physical reality. With reference to the work of physicists such as John Wheeler, Roger Penrose, George Ellis, David Bohm, Anton Zeilinger and Michael Mensky, Wallace presents an interpretation of natural science in which the observable physical universe arises in dependence upon conscious observation. Throughout these works, Wallace advocates for the relevance of Buddhist philosophical and meditative insights to the ongoing development of the sciences and even suggests how the kinds of miraculous powers believed by Buddhists to be possessed by accomplished meditators might be possible.

However, like Stephen Batchelor, Wallace is another interesting interlocutor in this debate in that he is also a somewhat unconventional Buddhist scholar. In fact, Wallace and Batchelor trained together as Tibetan Buddhist monks, giving

them a very similar background.[24] While Wallace, unlike Batchelor, is a doctor of religions studies, he also has degrees in physics and the philosophy of science, meaning that his engagement with this debate is not defined by one clear and simple academic discipline. This crossing of disciplinary boundaries is also found in Flanagan's work insofar as it blends philosophy of mind and science with some light Buddhist scholarship.

Furthermore, while there are brief mentions of the traditional multi-life perspective in Wallace's work, he has yet to explicitly present an argument for the rebirth hypothesis. This is somewhat disappointing given that Wallace has written a polemical response to Stephen Batchelor's interpretation of the Buddha's teachings found in *Confessions of a Buddhist Atheist* and *Buddhism without Beliefs.*[25] Wallace is particularly scathing about Batchelor's attempts to side-line the importance of karma and rebirth so it is a shame that, with his deep knowledge of both physics and Buddhist philosophy, Wallace has not, to my knowledge, produced a popular defence of rebirth that answers the most common physicalist and secularist qualms. It is these qualms that motivate Batchelor's deep scepticism about rebirth and Flanagan's denouncement of the multi-life perspective as epistemically unrespectable.

3.5 Nigel Tetley's The Doctrine of Rebirth in Theravada Buddhism

In order to find the kind of investigation that aims to evaluate traditional arguments for rebirth in an even-handed manner we can look to two works of excellent scholarship: Nigel Tetley's PhD thesis *The Doctrine of Rebirth in Theravāda Buddhism: Arguments for and against* and Evan Thompson's *Waking Dreaming Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation,*

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[24] See Stephen Schettini, 'An Old Story of Faith and Doubt: Reminiscences of Alan Wallace and Stephen Batchelor', *Mandala,* April, 2011.

[25] B. Alan Wallace, 'Distorted Visions of Buddhism: Agnostic and Atheist', in *Mandala,* October, 2010. For Batchelor's response see his 'An Open Letter To B. Alan Wallace', *Mandala,* January, 2011.

and Philosophy. Tetley's aim was to 'ascertain whether there is any valid set of epistemological reasons for a non-Buddhist, twentieth century Westerner to regard the Theravādin concept of rebirth as true.'[26] Apart from the exclusive focus on Theravāda Buddhism, the aims of Tetley's project bear remarkable similarity to those of my own. The differences lie in the kinds of arguments that are explored. Tetley examines two broad groupings of argument for rebirth.

Firstly he investigates the arguments for rebirth that are supported by belief in kamma or karma. These arguments primarily seek to justify rebirth on the basis that if disparities of fortune in this life are to be explained, former lives must be posited. The underlying assumption is that suffering and misfortune is caused by morally reprehensible acts just as happiness and fortune are caused by morally praiseworthy ones. Such arguments trade on the assumption, common in theological arguments, that the universe must ultimately be a just place. Such an assumption of universal justice is unlikely to be shared by the secular audience at whom the present project is aimed. In contrast, Tetley, writing in 1988, was seeking an argument for rebirth that would satisfy *twentieth century* Westerners, many of whom will have had strong Christian sympathies.

Nevertheless, it is the second type of argument on which Tetley spends the most time. These arguments are empirical arguments that seek to present Buddhist claims about rebirth as being based on observation and appeal to memory, particularly past life memories. Tetley shows how such arguments from memory get bogged down in questions regarding the reliability of such memories. The initial problem concerns the phenomenon of 'cryptomnesia' in which the origins of a memory are forgotten though the memory itself remains. A researcher cannot rule out the simple possibility that a subject claiming to recall a past life acquired information about that past life in their present life but forgot about this act of acquisition. Any information that is available about a past life that is available to the researcher will also have been available to the

[26] Nigel Tetley, *The Doctrine of Rebirth In Theravāda Buddhism: Arguments for and against*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Bristol, 1990, p.2.

subject. This is why the ever-present possibility of cryptomnesia presents a problem for a researcher seeking to verify the accuracy of a subject's alleged past life memories.

The deeper problem is whether memories about a past life are even admissible as evidence for rebirth. Tetley explores the question of whether the transfer of memories, were it proven to occur, tells us anything about the continuity of a person from one life to the next. The point in contention is that a memory could conceivably survive death and travel to a new host without this meaning that a person has been reborn. Here Tetley concludes that the Buddhist conception of rebirth, based as it is on causal continuity, does not take memories to be the basis of personal identity. As a result, even genuine and accurate memories from a past life would not demonstrate that the person inheriting those memories had previously been the person that those memories were initially produced in. These problems are also addressed in John Hick's vast work *Death and Eternal Life,* as well as in Roy Perrett's *Death and Immortality*.[27]

Questions regarding the reliability of memory in past-life claims are also dealt with by Evan Thompson in *Waking Dreaming Being.* The difference between Tetley and Thompson's approaches is that, when it comes to evaluating the plausibility of rebirth, Thompson places more emphasis on the question of whether an individual consciousness could continue to exist after bodily death. In contrast, Tetley's focus is on the reliability of past life memories and personal identity. It is the emphasis that Thompson places on consciousness that allows his somewhat sympathetic approach to rebirth to be compared more readily with Owen Flanagan's unsympathetic appraisal.

[27] See John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life,* Collins, 1976. See also Roy W. Perrett, *Death and Immortality*, Springer, 1987.

3.6 Evan Thompson's Waking, Dreaming, Being

In *Waking, Dreaming, Being,* Thompson investigates the full range of ways in which we can be conscious: wakefulness, pure awareness, dreaming, lucid dreaming, imagination, out of body experiences, sleeping, dying and self-awareness. In doing so he utilises his considerable knowledge of Buddhist and ancient Indian philosophy, western philosophy of mind (including phenomenological approaches) as well as discoveries in neuroscience. The purpose of his book is to defend the enactivist view that the conscious self is a process of self-making rather than an illusion or a substantial entity.[28] Yet it is his exploration of consciousness itself that fills most of the pages of his book and provides a great deal to think about. This exploration extends to the question of whether subjectivity might continue to persist beyond death.

For example, in the opening prologue Thompson recounts the events at a two-day conference at MIT in which both he and the fourteenth Dalai Lama spoke about the relationship between consciousness and the brain during a panel discussion:

> Midway into this discussion, the Dalai Lama says something that takes me by surprise. It connects to a question about consciousness and the brain I've thought about for a long time…Is consciousness wholly dependent on the brain or does consciousness transcend the brain?[29]

While Flanagan's answer to the Dalai Lama's question is a vehement "no!" Thompson returns to it repeatedly throughout *Waking Dreaming Being* and does so in relation to the consequences the answer might have for the potential for consciousness to continue to exist after death. Thompson's genuine interest in claims about the afterlife should be welcomed given the relative dearth of research into the consequences that our approach to consciousness has for claims about what happens to it after death. This genuine interest makes

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[28] Evan Thompson, *Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy*, Columbia University Press, 2015, pp.xxxi-xxxix.
[29] Ibid., p.xx.

Waking Dreaming Being a very useful piece of research for the purposes of this current project. Evan Thompson provides a brilliant guide as almost the quintessential (highly) educated westerner attempting to understand the questions raised by ancient traditions such as Buddhism. He engages with a broad range of arguments, including those based on reported out-of-body and near-death experiences, even hinting that he himself has experienced the former.[30] He is nevertheless committed to examining such reports critically and making use of neuroscientific evidence where relevant. Where the evidence is lacking for the validity of such reports, Thompson accepts these findings but clearly with a heavy heart. In doing this, Thompson provides much of the groundwork needed to present a case for the continuity of consciousness after death.

In particular, Thompson's clear analysis of different types of consciousness allows us to begin setting out what the phenomenon actually is and why we might consider its continuity after death to be a possibility. Thompson makes use of the fact that, in western philosophy of mind, consciousness can be categorised in two ways. It can mean either 'awareness in the sense of *subjective experience* or awareness in the sense of *cognitive access*.' Firstly, when we take it to mean subjective experience, 'we can say you're conscious of something when it appears to you some way in your experience'. Furthermore, 'a mental or bodily state is conscious when there is something it's like for the subject to be in that state.' Such subjective experience is also called phenomenal consciousness. Phenomenal consciousness is the precondition for subjective experiences, the condition without which there would be no reason for claiming that anything had a subjective character. But consciousness can also be understood to mean "access consciousness". In this case,

[30] In Chapter 7 of *Waking Dreaming Being*, Thompson draws the conclusion that there is little, if any, reliable evidence that out-of-body experiences imply the existence of an astral body. However, in a rare insight into the emotional impact reasoning has on a philosopher, he describes how this is a 'bitter pill to swallow'. He identifies himself as one of those who have had such experiences and feel that the vividness and emotional power of such experiences does draw one towards some kind of ontological dualism.

Thompson explains, ‘you are conscious of something when you can report or describe it, or reason about it, or use it to guide how you act or behave.’[31]

To clarify the distinction between subjective experience and cognitive access, Thompson provides the example of an image flashing by on a screen. This image appears and disappears so rapidly that we are not able to form the sort of memory that would allow us to clearly describe or think about what it was. This image-experience was too rapid to be access conscious but was nonetheless phenomenally conscious.[32] Examples of the opposite situation would be cases where systems with artificial intelligence are able to report, describe and respond to a stimulus without necessarily having any phenomenal consciousness associated with that stimulus. Such systems could be said to be access conscious without being phenomenally conscious.

Thompson points out that within Indian and Tibetan philosophical traditions we often find consciousness defined as ‘luminous’, ‘having the power to reveal, like a light.’ ‘Consciousness’, Thompson explains, ‘is fundamentally that which reveals or makes manifest because it is the crucial precondition for appearance.’[33] From this description we can determine that it is phenomenal consciousness rather than access consciousness which has this luminous character. Appearance is a core feature of phenomenal consciousness because where something appears, where there are experiences, there is phenomenal consciousness.

Furthermore, Thompson provides important insights into the nature of phenomenal consciousness and its ‘illuminating’ character. Specifically he argues convincingly against what he refers to as the ‘other-illumination’ theory of consciousness. He introduces this argument with reference to the parallel debates that have taken place within both Indian and western philosophy regarding the question of whether consciousness is self-illuminating or whether

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[31] Ibid., p.7.
[32] Ibid., p.8.
[33] Ibid., p.14.

it needs to be illuminated by something else first. According to other-illumination theories, in order to have a phenomenally conscious episode of seeing a sunset 'you need to have some kind of higher-level, inner cognition of your seeing.'[34] This higher-level cognition brings illumination and phenomenal character to the experience of seeing a sunset.

However, insofar as it brings the phenomenal quality that is essential for true consciousness, the higher-level cognition must itself be phenomenally conscious. But in order to be conscious in this way, the higher-level cognition must be illuminated by an even *higher* level cognition. This requirement leads to a vicious infinite regress because every episode of phenomenal consciousness requires a higher-level cognition that can only be phenomenally conscious if there is yet another cognition. On the other hand, if we deny that the higher-level cognition needs to be phenomenally conscious, we are left with two unconscious factors, neither of which has any phenomenal character. We are then expected to believe that together these amount to a phenomenally conscious experience. Thompson does not find this theory convincing and, as we shall see later on, it amounts to a form of emergence that we have good reasons to reject. The alternative to other-illumination theories is the view that 'prereflective self-awareness' is simply what phenomenal consciousness is: 'consciousness is self-luminous or self-revealing'.[35] Thompson mentions the traditional analogy of the lamp, which illuminates itself whilst at the same time illuminating others.

In this way, Thompson argues that it is part of the reflexive character of phenomenal consciousness to reveal and witness itself whilst also revealing events such as a sunset. This reflexive character is another key distinction between consciousness as cognitive access and consciousness as phenomenal awareness. In exploring the potential continuity of consciousness beyond death, Thompson is primarily concerned with the continuity of

[34] Ibid., p.16.
[35] Ibid., p.17.

phenomenal consciousness. The possibility being explored is whether subjective experiences of some kind or another might continue after bodily and brain functions have ceased, even if this is not necessarily accompanied by cognitive access to such experiences.

The distinction between phenomenal and access consciousness allows Thompson to engage meaningfully with arguments from Tibetan and ancient Indian sources, which claim that consciousness persists while we are deeply asleep. Given these distinct types of consciousness it is plausible for ancient Indian and Tibetan philosophers to suggest that there might be phenomenally conscious experiences to which there is little or no cognitive access. Thompson suggests there could be levels of very subtle phenomenal consciousness for which there is 'something it's like for the subject to be in that state' even if the experiences involved cannot be clearly recalled or reported.

For example, there might be such subtle experiences during deep sleep that we cannot draw upon them in waking life. Within both Indian and Tibetan philosophy, we find claims that these subtle experiences can eventually be accessed through mental training or meditation.[36] This can be understood as a more exotic version of the commonplace practice of recalling dreams after a little effort. Often we barely recall what we dreamt about the night before but with certain techniques this vague sense of having dreamt something resolves into a clear memory of the dream. Another example occurs during the practice of deep concentration on the sensations of the body. Often a practitioner becomes acutely aware of painful sensations that were not noticed previously but were in fact subtly impacting on their posture or movement. Within Indian and Tibetan philosophy we also find claims that these subtle levels of consciousness persist not only in deep sleep but also in death.[37] Thompson is interested in arguments from Indian and Tibetan philosophy because of the way

[36] Ibid., p.8.
[37] Ibid., pp.10-13.

in which they take consciousness to be continuous across a lifetime and not something punctuated by frequent gaps during deep sleep.

Thompson's interest in the possibility that consciousness is continuous throughout periods of waking and sleeping leads him to explore the development of this idea in Buddhist thought. In particular he looks at the Yogācāra School and its concept of store-consciousness, so called because of its ability to "store" tendencies towards thought, feeling and action across distinct moments.[38] One of the key elements of the Yogācāra view is the idea that consciousness consists of a continuously changing background awareness that gives rise to particular moments of awareness that are of specific objects. For Thompson, the Yogācāra view is important in that it recognises the need to distinguish between background changes in consciousness and 'rapidly changing episodes of sensory and cognitive awareness'.[39] He draws parallels between this idea and the distinction in contemporary philosophy of mind between the perceptual or cognitive awareness of an object, sometimes called *state consciousness*, which is transitive in that it takes an object, and the life-consciousness, sentience or *creature consciousness*, which refers to the whole subject of experience. According to the Yogācāra School, an episode of *state consciousness* of an object arises in part due to the pre-existing presence of a background *creature consciousness*.

Thompson also draws connections between the Yogācāra view of consciousness and approaches to consciousness within western philosophy and neuroscience. In particular he uses it to explain why it makes sense for experiments in neuroscience to move away from a 'building block model' of consciousness. This model assumes that the neural activity corresponding to each content of consciousness could be used to build up an overall picture of the correlates of consciousness. Instead, researchers are beginning to explore the correlates of consciousness as a whole.

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[38] Ibid, p.60.
[39] Ibid., pp.60-63.

For example, experiments in binocular rivalry have been used as a means to dissociate the neural activity corresponding to conscious vision from that which corresponds to unconscious vision. The idea behind such experiments is that when there are two different visual stimuli, one for each eye, only one can be dominantly perceived at a time. As the visual stimuli compete for perceptual dominance, they alternate in being dominantly perceived. Corresponding neural activity can then be studied in order to discover whether there is specific neural activity that corresponds to the movement of stimuli between consciousness and unconsciousness. This approach adopts the 'unified field' model of consciousness, which has been advocated by philosopher John Searle.[40] According to this model it is not enough to simply find the neural correlates for every object of consciousness as each object already presupposes a background consciousness that is modified by its content. The new approach, exemplified by binocular rivalry experiments, is to search for the neural correlates of the continuous background field of consciousness.[41] Of course, Thompson's view that there is a continuous unified field of consciousness throughout a lifetime of waking and sleeping is based on the assumption that it is a unified field of *phenomenal* rather than *access* consciousness.

If there is indeed phenomenal consciousness without cognitive access during periods of deep sleep and coma, the lack of access would account for the belief that consciousness disappears during these periods. The state of consciousness at death is often considered to be akin to deep sleep or coma, but if these are not in fact examples of full unconsciousness, this analogy does not hold. Death would be the sole case in which the continuity of phenomenal consciousness completely ceases and would not be analogous to anything that occurs in life. This would not make the complete cessation of consciousness at death less plausible but it would allow for an analogy in the opposite direction. If periods of reduced brain activity result in a loss of access rather than

[40] John Searle, 'Consciousness', *Annual Review of Neuroscience,* Vol. 23, 2000, p.563.
[41] Thompson, *Waking Dreaming Being,* pp.64,65.

phenomenal consciousness, complete loss of brain activity could be treated in a similar way. Regardless of whether such a reverse analogy would be convincing, it is ultimately the distinction itself between phenomenal and access consciousness that motivates Thompson to take claims about the possibility of consciousness existing after body and brain functions have ceased seriously.

Cognitive access involves reporting and responding to stimuli, something which can be done by physical machines without reference to any unusual or exotic characteristics. But phenomenal consciousness, being fundamentally subjective in character, presents a challenge to those who wish to reduce or explain it in purely objective terms. This challenge has come to be known as the 'Hard Problem' of Consciousness since David Chalmers first used the phrase.[42] Following the work of Chalmers and also Thomas Nagel, it has been widely acknowledged that phenomenal consciousness presents a significant challenge to the usual attempts at reductive physicalist explanation.

3.7 Conclusion: Rebirth and the 'Hard Problem' of Consciousness

In both *What is it like to be a bat?* and *Subjective and objective,* Nagel argues that our knowledge regarding the physical facts about an organism, such as a bat, tells us nothing about "what it is like" to be that organism. This "what it is like"-ness is the subjective, phenomenal quality of an organism's experiences, which cannot be inferred from the objective, physical facts about the organism.[43] The objective perspective of the natural sciences provides us with what Nagel calls a 'view from nowhere' in contrast to the subjective first-personal viewpoint or 'view from somewhere' that organisms such as bats and ourselves enjoy.[44] As Nagel makes clear, the successful reduction of

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[42] Chalmers, David J., 'Facing Up To The Problem Of Consciousness', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 2, No.3, March 1995, p.200.
[43] See Thomas Nagel, 'What is it like to be a bat?', in *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1979, pp.165-180.
[44] See Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere,* Oxford University Press, 1986.

phenomena such as water to H2O molecules or lightning to electrical discharge is successful insofar as we can strip away the subjective aspects of the phenomenon in question until we are left with what it is when viewed from no particular perspective. The reductionist explanation for the special properties found in water and lightning involves removing the subjective qualities such as what water feels like to our touch or what lightning looks like to us on a stormy night. Once these have been removed, we are left with the objective properties of water and lightning, properties that do not depend upon a conscious observer. These properties can be reduced to the properties of H2O molecules or electrical discharge with relative ease.[45]

This success cannot, however, be replicated in the case of conscious observers themselves. To strip away the subjective properties from consciousness is to be left with something that completely lacks one of the essential features that makes consciousness the sort of thing that it is. Insofar as there is 'something it is like' to be phenomenally conscious there is a subjective, first-person perspective according to which there is something that it is like to, for example, listen to birdsong, be awestruck by lightning, bathe in water, or watch a sunset. To strip consciousness of this subjectivity is not to reductively explain consciousness but rather to lose sight of consciousness entirely.[46]

And yet, the subjective character of consciousness renders it thoroughly distinct from the objective phenomena that populate the world according to the natural sciences. This is illustrated by Nagel's use of the example of a bat. The physical facts about a bat, the organisation of its organs and nervous system, the way in which it uses a form of sonar in order to navigate in the dark, can all be explained and described in objective, third-personal terms that do not depend upon any particular perspective. But the phenomenal quality of the bat's consciousness, for example what it is like to navigate via sonar, is not something that we can learn from an objective, third-personal description of the

[45] See Nagel, 'What is it like to be a bat?', pp.165,166,172-174.
[46] See Thomas Nagel, 'Subjective and objective', in *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1979, pp.196-213.

bat. There are facts about the bat, subjective facts, which do not seem to be reducible to, nor explicable in terms of, objective facts.[47]

While Nagel problematized attempts to reductively explain consciousness in the purely objective terms of the natural sciences, Chalmers presents an argument that goes even further in suggesting that physical properties are fundamentally distinct from the phenomenal properties found in consciousness. Chalmers asks us to imagine a world that is physically identical to ours and that is populated with identical duplicates of the physical organisms that populate our world. Such a world will include organisms that are physically identical to ourselves, which means that every physical fact that is true of us will be true of them also. We are then asked to imagine that these physical duplicates are devoid of any and all phenomenal consciousness. These duplicates might be "access conscious" insofar as they can report and describe their sensory and internal physiological states, they can reason about these states and use them to guide how they act or behave, but there is nothing 'that it is like' to be these organisms. There is no subjective, first-person perspective associated with the physical, biological, and physiological events that constitute these duplicates. Chalmers takes the view that such "zombies" are conceivable and that such a world is a possible one.[48] The conclusion of this Zombie Argument is that there is nothing about the physical properties of an organism that necessarily entails the existence of phenomenal properties. It is possible to have physical properties without phenomenal properties.[49] This leaves us with a situation in which a complete understanding of the physical facts about the human organism might tell us nothing about the subjective, phenomenal facts.

Both Chalmers and Nagel's arguments demonstrate that mainstream accounts of the physical world, including the body, do not include the kinds of subjective characteristics that would account for the existence of phenomenal

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[47] See Nagel, 'What is it like to be a bat?', pp.168,169.
[48] See David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp.93-171.
[49] Ibid., p.104.

consciousness. If we cannot provide a clear explanation for *how* phenomenal consciousness arises from physical processes, our assumption *that* they nonetheless do so is more akin to an article of faith than a reasoned position. The difficulties involved in trying to explain the origins of consciousness should lead us to question whether phenomenally conscious states are entirely dependent upon physical processes. If the dependence of conscious states on physical processes is brought into question, the suggestion that conscious states might persist beyond bodily death acquires some plausibility. Evaluating the plausibility of such a suggestion on the basis of empirical evidence is not a straightforward task because this would ideally involve objective observation of conscious states. As Nagel has made clear, observing first-person states objectively, that is, from a third-person perspective seems, in principle, impossible. The discovery of correlations between the reports of test subjects regarding their conscious states and other objectively observable phenomena does not constitute direct observation of the actual nature of consciousness.

Furthermore, correlations and repeated coincidences can occur for many reasons that do not involve one phenomenon's existence depending upon another's. Claims about the nature of subjectivity and its potential to continue beyond bodily death must be supported by arguments about the fundamental nature of reality and what kind of properties exist within it. These would be metaphysical arguments rather than empirical investigations. For those, like Owen Flanagan, who take the natural sciences to offer the best paradigm of knowledge, this might seem like a backward step. But such arguments are needed in order to determine whether consciousness has its origins in biological or even physical processes. It is therefore worth exploring some of the arguments that have been made by those defending the view that consciousness is not dependent upon the body and persists beyond death.

However, those who wish to defend rebirth as an afterlife possibility must overcome some key hurdles. These hurdles have been most clearly recognised in the work of Flanagan, Arnold and, as we shall see, Thompson. Flanagan's work is particularly effective in highlighting the problem that mental causation poses for those who wish to claim that consciousness is not dependent on the

physiology of the brain. Any effects that such a consciousness could have on the physical world would, presumably, have been noticed as strange occurrences unaccounted for by the physiological facts. In *Brains Buddhas and Believing*, Dan Arnold highlights another key hurdle: Making *any* metaphysical claim about the nature of consciousness is problematic given that this must involve claims about the conditions for consciousness. As Arnold points out, according to the arguments first made by Kant, knowledge is only made possible by *transcendental* conditions, and knowledge of their true nature may not be possible from within consciousness itself. One cannot say whether consciousness continues to exist after death if the ultimate nature of the conditions of consciousness and what governs them cannot be known by us. Colin McGinn has defended this view, arguing that our minds are *cognitively closed* with respect to the theories or properties that would enable us to understand the place of consciousness in the world.[50]

Nevertheless, as an exploration of the relationship between consciousness and death, *Waking Dreaming Being* highlights the major issues facing any claims made about the ultimate nature of consciousness and potential continuity of subjectivity beyond death. In the next chapter I will use *Waking Dreaming Being* as a starting point in order to argue that, insofar as we accept that consciousness presents a challenge to the standard physicalist model of reality, we should begin to consider the possibility that consciousness has some kind of afterlife. To claim that it is unlikely, implausible, or impossible for consciousness to continue beyond death involves making strong and increasingly contestable assumptions about the nature and origins of subjectivity. It is for this reason that the current dearth of interest in considering rebirth as a respectable possibility has more to do with the naturalistic turn within contemporary philosophy of mind than with any lack of good reasons to consider consciousness to be capable of surviving physical death.

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[50] Colin McGinn, 'Can We Solve the Mind--Body Problem?' *Mind*, Vol. 98, No.391, July, 1989, p.350.

4. The Characteristics of Consciousness and Matter

4.1 Introduction

In *Waking Dreaming Being,* Evan Thompson examines one of the earliest known and most commonly cited arguments for the Buddhist view that sentient beings are reborn after death. This is the argument made by Indian philosopher Dharmakīrti (circa 600-660 CE) found in the *Pramānavārttika*. This argument has already been touched upon in the second chapter as has the fact that one of its key premises is the claim that consciousness cannot arise from that which is purely physical. Thompson's examination of Dharmakīrti's argument is one of the few examples of a contemporary philosopher exploring and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the argument in the light of contemporary discussions in the philosophy of mind and consciousness. Insofar as we are aiming to determine how rebirth might be defended in a contemporary context, Thompson's approach to Dharmakīrti's argument provides us with a good point of departure:

> Dharmakīrti reasoned as follows: matter and consciousness have totally different natures; an effect must be of the same nature as its cause; hence consciousness cannot arise from or be produced by matter (though material things can condition or influence consciousness).[1]

Dharmakīrti's argument predates one that René Descartes would make to a similar end a millennium later. The key premise, as presented by Thompson, is that matter is fundamentally obstructive, it resists other instances of matter, while the luminous nature of consciousness is unobstructed and non-obstructing, like open space it is capable of including diverse objects. Consciousness can also cognise an object as well as itself, matter does neither.

[1] Evan Thompson, *Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy*, Columbia University Press, 2015, p.82.

Dharmakīrti's description of the characteristics of consciousness is accepted by Thompson, and rightly so. Consciousness, specifically *phenomenal* consciousness, is 'luminous' insofar as it involves reflexive self-awareness as well as intentional or object-directed awareness. The metaphorical 'luminosity' of consciousness can be primarily understood as the fact that it is always an awareness *of* an object. In western philosophy, one of the most influential philosophers to recognise this aspect of consciousness was Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). As mentioned in the second chapter (section 2.4) Husserl, following Brentano, recognised that consciousness is intentional: it intends or is directed towards objects.[2] As consciousness is approached with increasing seriousness within the philosophy of mind, phenomenological work such as Husserl's is being explored with increasing interest and more contemporary philosophers are appreciating the intrinsically intentional character of consciousness.[3]

4.2 The Core Characteristics of Consciousness

Consciousness is the awareness that discloses the fact that anything exists. With phenomenal consciousness there is "something that it is like" to exist and it is this phenomenal quality that reveals the existence of the world.[4] The very fact that there is any experience of anything at all is part and parcel of the object-directed character of phenomenal consciousness, which presents the world through objects with phenomenal qualities. This world-revealing character is also notable in that it 'illuminates' diverse phenomena. When we consider the differences between a bird's song and a sunset we can also recognise the fact that the same characteristic of awareness is capable of disclosing the distinct phenomenal characteristics of these two experiences at different times. This characteristic is also able to unify these diverse

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[2] Ibid., p.36.
[3] See Dan Zahavi, 'Intentionality and Phenomenality: A Phenomenological Take on the Hard Problem', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy,* Supp.Vol.29, 2003, pp.63-92.
[4] Ibid., pp.63,67.

phenomena, bringing them together into a single awareness of *both* birdsong *and* sunset.

However, to be phenomenally conscious of birdsong does not involve only awareness of birdsong, it also involves a degree of awareness of the very fact that there is awareness of birdsong. Jean-Paul Sartre understood this self-awareness to be the very precondition required for consciousness of an object to be possible. He refers to consciousness as being 'pour-soi' or for-itself.[5] This is to say that consciousness is 'self-given' in experience, it shows up as a constituting feature of every experience.[6] Whether or not consciousness is intrinsically self-aware is a question that has been discussed and disputed by both Indian and western philosophers of consciousness.[7]

Nevertheless, within both Indian and western philosophical traditions a variety of arguments have been put forward providing good reasons to suggest that consciousness is indeed intrinsically self-aware.[8] If phenomenal consciousness is not intrinsically self-aware then an additional consciousness will need to be posited in order to account for the awareness of awareness. We are then left with two consciousnesses, one that is directed towards the object and a higher-order consciousness that is directed towards the consciousness of the object. This model of two consciousnesses only works if we do not look too closely at the actual nature of consciousness. Insofar as object-directed consciousness

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[5] See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* trans. Hazel E. Barnes, London, New York, Routledge, 2008.

[6] Dan Zahavi, 'The Experiential Self: Objections and Clarifications', in *Self, No Self?: Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions*, Siderits, Mark; Thompson, Evan; and Zahavi, Dan, (eds.) Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, p.56.

[7] See *Self, No Self?: Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions*, Siderits, Mark; Thompson, Evan; and Zahavi, Dan, (eds.) Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010.

[8] See Dan Arnold, *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing,* New York, Columbia University Press, 2012*,* pp.158-198. See also Joel Krueger, 'The Who and the How of Experience', in *Self, No Self?: Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions*, Siderits, Mark; Thompson, Evan; and Zahavi, Dan, (eds.) Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, pp.29-34. See also, Paul Williams, *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness: A Tibetan Madhyamaka Defence,* Curzon, 1998.

'illuminates' an object, it brings to awareness the phenomenal characteristics that constitute 'what it is like' to experience that object.[9]

For example, the phenomenal characteristics of seeing a sunset or tasting apple juice include every feature that constitutes 'what it is like' to see the orange sun meet the horizon or 'what it is like' to taste apple juice. These phenomenal characteristics are those features of the object that are known only in the subjective experience of the object and are therefore defined in terms of the subjective experience in which they are known. In other words, the visual experience of the sunset or the taste of apple juice involves characteristics that are only known through the having.[10] This particular form of knowing is precisely what is described as the 'illuminating' character of consciousness.

Consciousness of an object is therefore always a subjective experience that involves a phenomenal character. Understood this way, object-directed consciousness does not require a higher-order consciousness to illuminate it because the very awareness of phenomena involves an awareness that these phenomena are appearing. Once we accept that awareness of phenomena requires an awareness that these phenomena are appearing, an awareness of the awareness that constitutes this appearing has already been assumed. For someone to taste apple juice in the phenomenally conscious sense is for there to be something that it is like for them to taste its sweet apple flavour in their mouth. The phenomenal characteristics of this sweet apple flavour arise because they are illuminated by consciousness. Without this illumination, there would not be anything that it is like for someone to taste the apple juice. But what it is like to taste apple juice is not simply a matter of certain phenomenal

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[9] As mentioned in the previous chapter, this phrase goes back at least as far as Thomas Nagel's 'What is it like to be a bat?' in *The Philosophical Review,* pp.435-450, Vol. 83, No. 4, October, 1974.

[10] As Galen Strawson puts it 'when it comes to particular experiences, the having is the knowing'. See Strawson's 'Physicalist Panpsychism' in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness,* S. Schneider, and M. Velmans (eds.), Wiley, 2017, p.378.

characteristics being known. It is precisely the *way* in which these characteristics are known that makes them *phenomenal* characteristics.

For there to be something it is like for someone to taste sweet apple flavour in their mouth they must be aware of the sensations and flavours of the apple juice *as appearing to them.* Phenomenal characteristics must arise as *appearances to a subject* in order to be genuinely *phenomenal* characteristics at all. Without *appearing as if to a subject*, the phenomenal characteristics involved in tasting apple juice would not amount to the kind of *subjective* qualities that constitute 'what it is like' for someone to taste sweet apple flavour in their mouth. This is why any phenomenal consciousness of the taste of apple juice must also be accompanied by an awareness of this taste *as appearing to a subject.* At the same time as being aware of the taste of apple juice, the taster of the apple juice is also aware of this taste as appearing to them. This is required in order for there to be something it is like for the taster to taste the apple juice at all. And to say that someone is aware that appearing to them, within their awareness, is a taste of apple juice in their mouth is no different from saying that they are *aware of their awareness* of the taste of apple juice. This is why their experience of tasting apple juice already involves some degree of awareness *of* awareness. Some degree of self-awareness is built into this phenomenal experience.

Nevertheless, perhaps we have been too quick to conclude that all awareness of phenomena involves an awareness that these phenomena are appearing. There might be a very basic awareness of objects in which the appearance of those objects to consciousness is not itself conscious. For example, we might be in a deep conversation with a friend who mentions that there is loud building work going on in another room. Once our friend has mentioned the noise we recognise that we were hearing it all along but it was not something that we noticed. We might then surmise that we were aware of the noise but we were not aware of this awareness until our friend mentioned the noise. In this case we might conclude that we were conscious of the noise in a way that did not involve any self-awareness. The important question here is whether this basic awareness could be considered to be a form of phenomenal consciousness or

not. If *phenomenal* consciousness always involves some degree of self-awareness, a lack of self-awareness with regard to the noisy building work might simply demonstrate that whatever basic awareness that we had of the noise before it was mentioned was not a form of *phenomenal* consciousness.

To ask whether we were phenomenally conscious of the noise before we noticed it is to ask whether there was 'something that it was like' to hear the noisy building work in the background but not to notice it (because we were focussed on a deep conversation). If not, our basic awareness of the noise cannot be considered to have been *phenomenally* conscious because there was nothing that it was like to hear the noise when it went unnoticed. In this case we cannot describe the noisy building work as *appearing within consciousness* or as *appearing as if to a subject.* The noise does not really *appear* at all. Rather than appearing to consciousness, the noise simply stimulates our nervous system and is then somehow "readied" for phenomenal consciousness without actually being phenomenally conscious. In this case we are dealing with something like what Ned Block refers to as *access consciousness,* which refers not to the phenomenal awareness of an object as an appearance but rather to the object's 'availability for use in reasoning and rationally guiding speech and action'.[11]

While phenomenal consciousness involves the appearance of an object to a subject, access consciousness involves the capacity for certain information to be available for rational action. In other words, for a given system to be *access* conscious of an object is for that system to have a representation of the object, a representation which can guide rational action. Such a representation need not be *phenomenally* conscious at all. It could therefore be the case that I can represent the loud noises coming from another room while in a deep conversation without being phenomenally conscious of these representations. The loud noises would be represented as present while not necessarily

[11] Ned Block, 'On a confusion about a function of consciousness', *Behavioural and brain sciences*, Vol. 18, 1995, p.227.

appearing within phenomenal consciousness. According to some theories of consciousness, these basic, non-conscious representations would be *lower-order* representations. These lower-order representations are object-directed but can also become objects of *higher-order* representations.[12] In the case of the unnoticed loud noise, phenomenal consciousness of this noise arises only once there is a higher-order representation of it: a higher-order representation of the lower-order representation of the loud noise. Once the other person mentions the noise, I begin to represent the phenomenally unconscious, lower-order representation and at this point I become phenomenally conscious of the noise.

However, neither access consciousness nor mental representations would involve the kind of object-directed 'illumination' exhibited by phenomenal consciousness. While we can be *access* conscious of a loud noise or otherwise represent that noise as occurring, in none of these cases is there any awareness of the phenomenal characteristics of the noise. Lower-order representations would certainly not amount to the kind of 'illuminating' that brings the phenomenal characteristics of an object into awareness. While lower-order representations of noise would be object-directed, they would not, according to higher-order theories, involve any kind of phenomenal character. Similarly, access consciousness is firmly distinguished from phenomenal consciousness insofar as only the latter form of consciousness has a phenomenal character.[13] Lacking phenomenal character, both of these forms of awareness could not capture the phenomenal characteristics of their objects. The way in which phenomenal consciousness reveals the existence of its object as something with a qualitative nature would be completely absent in the case of lower-order representations and access consciousness.

Insofar as they would merely be representations within a system, lower-order representations would not be the kind of *appearances as if to a subject* that

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[12] See, among others, Peter Carruthers, *Phenomenal Consciousness: A Naturalistic Theory,* Cambridge University Press, 2003.

[13] Block, 'On a confusion about a function of consciousness', pp.230-231.

characterise phenomenal consciousness. Such appearances involve an intrinsic degree of self-awareness because such appearances involve some degree of awareness that they are appearing to a subject. This is not to say that neither access consciousness nor mental representations can be directed towards objects. Rather, the claim is that the kind of object-directedness involved in these forms of awareness does not seem to have much in common with the kind of 'illuminating' object-directedness involved in phenomenal consciousness. Phenomenal consciousness is what makes phenomenal qualities known. No other form of consciousness or awareness does this. In all cases where there is an awareness *of* an object that includes the object's phenomenal qualities there will be 'something that it is like' for this awareness to occur. In these cases such awareness would be a form of phenomenal consciousness. Insofar as phenomenal qualities are those characteristics of an object that constitute how the object appears to a subject, such characteristics must remain unknown until they arise within phenomenal consciousness.

Therefore, the kind of object-directedness that a lower-order or access consciousness might involve would be limited in an important way. In the case of hearing noisy building work there is 'something that it is like' to hear this noise coming from another room. This qualitative aspect of hearing noise only turns up within phenomenal consciousness. If we remove the phenomenal qualities of the noise, if we remove the way in which the noise appears to the subject, what is left is not the object that we are familiar with. What we experience is the phenomenally propertied noise, this is the object *as we know it*. The phenomenally propertied noises, sights, smells, textures, and so on, which we encounter in our lives, are objects as 'illuminated' by phenomenal consciousness. A type of consciousness that lacks any awareness of the phenomenal qualities of sounds, sights, smells, and so on is one that is directed at its objects in a completely different way from the way in which phenomenal consciousness is directed towards objects. And whatever form of object-directedness such consciousness might involve, we are primarily familiar with the object-directedness of phenomenal consciousness precisely because it is this form of object-directedness that involves self-awareness.

Therefore, if there is nothing that it is like to hear the noisy building work whilst in a deep conversation, any awareness of such noise will be neither self-aware nor object-directed in the way that phenomenal consciousness is. Such an example would not present a challenge to those Indian and western philosophical positions in which *phenomenal* consciousness is always *both* intrinsically self-aware *and* object-directed.

Of course, our answer to the question of whether there is 'something that it is like' to hear noisy building work in the background but not to notice it might be "yes". In this case we can be taken to be asserting something along the lines that the noisy building work appears within consciousness as if to a subject but that there is only the most dull or vague recognition of this fact until our friend points it out to us. The claim is that there is some degree of awareness *of* awareness *of* the noise even though this self-awareness is barely noticed. Such awareness of awareness would simply be dull or peripheral in contrast to the vivid, focal self-consciousness of the conversation itself. For such a claim to work we must accept that we can be phenomenally conscious of more than the object of our vivid attention. This is not a particularly problematic claim given that there are a number of commonplace examples of peripheral phenomenal consciousness.

For example, let us imagine that I am standing up whilst in deep conversation with my friend. My awareness of what it is like to talk with my friend is central to my experience and therefore vivid. When I am talking with my friend I am aware that I am involved in a conversation and this awareness exhibits reflexive self-awareness: I am aware that I am conscious of this situation. Now let us consider my awareness of being standing whilst conversing. If I am deep in conversation, we can presume that I am not vividly aware of 'what it is like' to be standing up. And yet, I would not claim that 'what it is like' to be in this particular deep conversation did not involve any of the phenomenal qualities associated with standing up. I would not, for example, claim that when talking to my friend I could not feel my legs or the floor under my feet. If that were the case I would presumably have entered into a trance-like state such that, when conversing, I lost all sense of myself as embodied from the waist down. This is

not impossible but it certainly isn't what normally happens when I am in a deep conversation. In most normal cases I remain aware of the feeling of my body as I stand but this awareness is a background feature of my experience that is neither as vivid nor as central as the features involved in the conversing itself.[14] Background features of the experience are part of what it is like to be conversing with my friend and, as such, I am phenomenally conscious of my *standing* whilst conversing. Despite being a background feature, the experience of standing appears *as if to a subject*. At the same time as experiencing this *standing-whilst-conversing*, I am also aware that the whole experience, of which standing is a part, is appearing. This is only possible because of the self-awareness that is part and parcel of phenomenal consciousness.

In the same way, I may also be phenomenally conscious of the noisy building work in the next room whilst deep in conversation with my friend. If the noise is a background feature of my experience then I might be phenomenally conscious of it, complete with an awareness of this awareness, without the focus of my attention being on the noise. It may even be the case that the noise appears to me in the background of my phenomenally conscious experience despite the fact that the thought, "there is noisy building work going on" might not have entered my mind until my friend mentions it. If *noticing* is a matter of degree, we might only fully notice a noise once we have had a clear thought about it. In this case it would be quite likely that we are phenomenally conscious of many things that we do not fully notice.[15] But in this case even the peripheral forms of phenomenal consciousness would involve a degree of self-awareness, albeit without this reflexive illumination being fully noticed. This is why such peripheral forms of phenomenal consciousness do not present a strong

[14] More will be said on the background, or fringe, of consciousness in Chapter Eight, section 8.5.

[15] Such a position could potentially make room for higher-order theories. Lower-order representations could be identified with the background features of experience, which are phenomenally conscious and self-aware albeit in a dull, peripheral manner that eludes proper notice whilst higher-order representations would be the foreground features of experience that are vivid, focal, and fully recognised.

challenge to those Indian and western philosophical positions in which *phenomenal* consciousness is *both* intrinsically self-aware *and* object-directed.

To be aware of objects *as phenomenally qualitied appearances* is to be aware of the very fact of their appearing, and awareness of this fact is awareness of the phenomenal consciousness to which they appear. Models of consciousness in which self-awareness is separated from object-directed awareness do not capture the phenomenal character of experienced objects. A type of object-directed awareness that is devoid of self-awareness cannot be object-directed in the way that phenomenal consciousness is. Whether we imagine the *access consciousness* discussed by Block or lower-order representations found in higher-order theories, object-directed awareness without phenomenal character cannot capture the familiar objects that populate everyday experience. Such objects have phenomenal qualities, which can only be captured by a form of awareness that is simultaneously aware of its object *as an object* and also *as an appearance within awareness itself*. Phenomenal consciousness is aware of its object in both ways because it is reflexively self-aware.

It is clear from his arguments in the *Pramānavārttika* that Dharmakīrti accepted that phenomenal consciousness is reflexive.[16] While there was much debate between Buddhist philosophers on this issue, I will not explore this here. The arguments for the intrinsic reflexive character of consciousness are compelling and, as we shall see, strengthen the argument for rebirth. Those Buddhist philosophers who wish to reject the idea that it is part of the character of consciousness to be reflexive will have one less feature to point to in order to demonstrate that consciousness does not simply arise from purely physical processes. Dharmakīrti's argument proceeds on the basis that the reflexive luminosity of consciousness is not shared by the material factors that constitute the body. If Buddhist philosophers wish to argue that the reflexivity of

[16] See Arnold, *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing*, pp.158-198.

consciousness emerges from other factors, so much the better for the materialist.

However, it has hopefully become clear from this brief overview of the issue that there are good reasons to believe that a separation between phenomenal consciousness as object-directed and phenomenal consciousness as self-reflexive cannot be made to work.

4.3 Buddhist Approaches to Consciousness and Matter

Dharmakīrti's chief claim is that, because matter and consciousness have completely different characteristics, they cannot be substantial causes for each other, only contributory conditions.[17] This view, as Thompson points out, depends on a particular view of causation in which there are at least two types of cause: 'substantial' or 'homogeneous' causes and 'contributory conditions' of an event.[18] Within the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, which Dharmakīrti would have been very familiar with, 'substantial' or 'homogeneous' causes (Sanskrit: *sabhāga-hetu*) are those factors that determine the character of an event and make it the type of event that it is.[19] The term for substantial cause can also be translated as *homogeneous* cause precisely because such causes are factors that have the *same character* as the event for which they are a cause. But a substantial or homogeneous cause (*sabhāga-hetu*) is not enough to give rise to an event.

In line with the vast majority of Buddhist philosophers coming before him, Dharmakīrti accepted that any event arises due to multiple factors. Whether we refer to these factors as causes (Sanskrit/Pali: *hetu),* as the Sarvāstivādins tend

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[17] Thompson, *Waking Dreaming Being,* pp.81-84. See also Dan Arnold, 'Dharmakīrti's Dualism: Critical Reflections on a Buddhist Proof of Rebirth', *Philosophy Compass*, Vol. 3, No. 5, 2008, pp.1082-1084.

[18] See Arnold, 'Dharmakīrti's Dualism', p.1083 and Thompson, *Waking Dreaming Being*, p.82.

[19] Bhikkhu K. L. Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma,* Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong, 2007, p.190.

to, or whether we generally describe them as conditions (Pali: *paccaya),* as the Theravādins tend to, the basic view of causation is the same.[20] The substantial cause is simply one type of cause or condition that is required for an event to arise. As Richard Hayes describes it, the substantial cause is the 'antecedent condition that belongs to the same class of things as the product itself.'[21] In this case, 'contributory conditions' are those factors other than the substantial cause, which contribute to the arising of an event (Sanskrit: *kāraṇa-hetu*) as well as those that arise along with and thus modify the basic character of the event (Sanskrit: *sahabhū-hetu* and *saṃprayuktaka-hetu*).[22]

A common example of the distinction between the substantial cause and contributory conditions is a seed and its environment.[23] An acorn grows into an oak tree and provides the core characteristics that make it an oak but it is environmental conditions such as the soil quality, the rain, and the sun, which provide the conditions for the oak tree to develop. The acorn can only grow into a tree with the right conditions but, no matter how good the conditions, without the acorn there can be no oak tree. Applied to consciousness and matter this example illustrates the idea that the subjective character of consciousness can be modified and conditioned by material events just as the character of matter can be modified and conditioned by conscious events but neither type of event is sufficient to produce the other. If a conscious event arises, there must have been a prior conscious event that was responsible for its subjective character.

If we follow this idea to its logical conclusion, we are left with the claim that even the very first conscious event of a sentient being's life must have amongst its causes a preceding moment of awareness. If bodily processes are purely material, lacking in any degree of awareness, they cannot be the sole causes of conscious events. The cognitive, conscious character of mental events can

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[20] Ibid., pp.181-211. See also Y. Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma: Its Inquiry Into the Nature of Conditioned Reality*, Centre for Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong, 2010, pp.262-281.

[21] Richard P. Hayes, 'Dharmakīrti on Punarbhava', *Studies in Original Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism*, Vol. 1, 1993, p.116.

[22] Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma,* pp.189-198.

[23] Hayes, 'Dharmakīrti on Punarbhava', pp.116-117.

only come about due to a prior event of the same kind. Therefore our current cognition must be the latest in a chain of mental events, each contributing to the arising of the next. Because we cannot posit a beginning to this causal chain, the beginning of this present life cannot be the beginning of our conscious existence. Dharmakīrti concludes that previous lives must be posited, following a pattern of birth, death and rebirth, in order to explain the origins of consciousness in this life. As Thompson summarises:

> [T]he death of the physical body doesn't interrupt the causally continuous series of moments of mental consciousness belonging to an individual stream of consciousness or mental continuum, though it does interrupt sensory consciousness, and this mental continuum eventually acts as a contributing condition in relation to another body in a future life.[24]

The strength of Dharmakīrti's argument rests primarily on two key premises. The first premise is that consciousness, or the mental continuum, has characteristics that are distinct from physical characteristics. The second premise is that the substantial cause for any event is a prior event with the same character. Events of a distinct character type can only condition the way in which an event of a different character type arises, they cannot bring that event about on their own. Thompson ultimately accepts the second premise of Dharmakīrti's argument and the reasons for accepting this premise will be explored later.

However, it is the first of Dharmakīrti's premises that Thompson ultimately rejects. As we shall see, Thompson does not believe that we can so easily distinguish the mental from the physical. In fact, he presents what he believes to be an alternative Buddhist approach to Dharmakīrti's distinction between mental and physical characteristics. Thompson contrasts Dharmakīrti's claim that consciousness isn't physical with a claim coming from the Vajrayāna system of Buddhist thought. In *The Universe in a Single Atom*, the Dalai Lama presents the Vajrayāna or Tantric Buddhist view as follows:

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[24] Thompson, *Waking Dreaming Being*, p.83.

> According to the Guhyasamaja tantra, a principal tradition within Vajrayāna Buddhism, at the most fundamental level, no absolute division can be made between mind and matter. Matter in its subtlest form is *prāṇa,* a vital energy which is inseparable from consciousness. These two are different aspects of an indivisible reality. *Prāṇa* is the aspect of mobility, dynamism, and cohesion, while consciousness is the aspect of cognition and the capacity for reflective thinking.[25]

Thompson makes reference to this passage and takes it to be a demonstration of the fundamental differences between the Vajrayāna approach to consciousness and Dharmakīrti's approach. In exploring this passage, Thompson clarifies that, although this particular claim might appear to be a standard physicalist approach to consciousness, the physical basis of consciousness is considered to be far more "subtle" than anything dealt with by current physics.[26]

According to the Vajrayāna system, the subtle physical energy called *prāṇa* denotes the aspects of 'mobility, dynamism, and cohesion', which are *inseparable* from the cognitive aspects of consciousness.[27] This indivisibility of consciousness and physical reality allows us to understand how something like mental causation might operate. As long as alterations in consciousness are at the same time alterations in subtle physical energy, and vice versa, interaction between subtle materiality and the rest of the physical world provides a site for two-way causation between the mental and the physical. This sort of approach avoids the pitfalls raised by Owen Flanagan in *The Bodhisattva's Brain*.

As we saw in the previous chapter, according to Flanagan, if consciousness can exist independently of any physical basis then it is difficult to understand how it could have an impact on the physical world. Our current scientific understanding of the world is predicated on the laws of thermodynamics, most notably that physical energy can neither be created nor destroyed. If

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[25] Dalai Lama, *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*, New York, Morgan Road, 2005, p.110.
[26] Thompson, *Waking Dreaming Being*, p.85.
[27] Dalai Lama, *Universe in a single atom*, p.110.

consciousness is not part of physical reality then its effects on the physical world amount to the creation of new energy. This would create numerous anomalies that scientific experiments would presumably have discovered by now.[28] It is the possibility of avoiding these problems that motivates Thompson to advocate the Vajrayāna approach to consciousness.

However, the Vajrayāna system is not alone in taking the view that consciousness continually arises with a physical aspect. Accounts of consciousness as being inseparable from a subtle physical aspect can be found in a range of the most influential Buddhist systems. Such a view can be found in the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma system and also in the work of Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu, both of which are heavily influential in the Tibetan traditions and the Vajrayāna system. Both Vasubandhu and the Sarvāstivādins took the view that consciousness would not be able to make the transition from one life to the next if it were not always accompanied by physical factors (Sanskrit/Pali: *rūpa)* even after death. As Robert Kritzer explains, 'for them, consciousness must be accompanied by the other *skandhas,* particularly *rūpa,* albeit in an attenuated state. They call this complete being *antarābhava.*'[29] As Kritzer explains, the five aggregates (Sanskrit: *skandhas*, Pali: *khandhās*) of consciousness, physical form, feeling, cognitions, and volition do not separate, according to the Sarvāstivādins. They held that some form of subtle or 'attenuated' physical factor accompanies consciousness even after death.

The view that consciousness travels from one lifetime to the next as an *antarābhava* complete with all five aggregates was contested, particularly by the Theravāda tradition. According to the Theravādins, along with some other Buddhist schools, there is no *antarābhava*. Rather, as Kritzer explains, 'rebirth is simply a matter of the succession of the last moment of consciousness in one life by the first moment of consciousness in the next.'[30]

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[28] Owen Flanagan, *The Bodhisattva's Brain: Buddhism Naturalized*, MIT Press, 2011, p.66.
[29] Robert Kritzer, 'Rūpa and Antarābhava', in *Journal of Indian Philosophy,* pp.235-272, Vol. 28, 2000, p.235.
[30] Ibid., p.235.

Nevertheless, it is notable that the Theravāda tradition did not deny that *human* and *animal* consciousness always arises with a physical factor.[31] The Theravādins, like most Buddhist traditions, agreed that eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body-consciousness, which grasp physical objects such as sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile features, arise in dependence on the relevant physical organs as their bases. But within the Theravāda tradition it was also held that mind-consciousness, which grasps mental objects, arises in dependence upon a physical basis.[32] The earliest references to this physical basis of the mind within the Theravāda Abhidhamma do not specify exactly what part of the body it is. Within the *Paṭṭhāna,* the *Abhidhamma Book of Conditional Relations,* this physical basis of the mind is referred to simply as 'whatever materiality on which mental activity depends'.[33] Karunadasa suggests that, rather than being an attempt at evasion, this phrase reveals 'that the physical seat of mental activity was thought to be very complex and pervasive and therefore that its location was not limited to one particular part of the physical body.'[34] Later in the Theravāda tradition we find that the physical basis of the mind is identified with the heart or, more accurately, the *heart-base* (Pali: *hadaya-vatthu*).[35] But Karunadasa specifically points out that the *heart-base* is 'not absolutely identical with the heart as such. Like the physical sense-organs, it is a subtle and delicate species of matter'.[36]

Here we might begin to see that the claims coming from the Theravāda tradition regarding the relationship between consciousness and physical reality are not so different from those coming from the Sarvāstivāda and Vajrayāna systems. All make reference to 'subtle' forms of physicality, or matter, when discussing the relationship between consciousness and the physical world. Disagreements regarding what happens between lives do not undermine the underlying agreement that consciousness in this world is continually accompanied by

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[31] See note 37
[32] See Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma,* pp.77,78.
[33] Ibid., p.79.
[34] Ibid., p.79.
[35] Ibid., p.79.
[36] Ibid., p.80.

some form of subtle physical stuff, whether that consciousness belongs to the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind.[37] When we bring this view together with the perspective on the physical basis of consciousness found in the *Paṭṭhāna,* the commonalities are even stronger. The *Paṭṭhāna* presents the materiality on which mind-consciousness depends as complex and pervasive, a view that is not far from the Vajrayāna perspective in which consciousness is inseparable from a subtle physical energy that pervades the body.

The intention here is not to claim that the positions held by the Vajrayāna, Sarvāstivāda, and Theravāda systems are more or less the same. Rather, the point is to demonstrate that, in making reference to the Vajrayāna view, Thompson is not pointing to a highly exotic iteration of Buddhist philosophy. There has been much debate between Buddhist schools as to whether mental consciousness, in contrast to the five kinds of sense consciousness, has a physical basis.[38] Neither position in this debate is particularly unorthodox. However, the Vajrayāna system simply adopts a position that is closer to that taken by the Sarvāstivādins and Theravādins than we might initially think.

As for Dharmakīrti, evidence suggests that he was strongly influenced by the work of Vasubandhu.[39] This fits insofar as, like Vasubandhu and the Sarvāstivādins, Dharmakīrti denied that mind-consciousness has a particular physical organ as a base.[40] It is likely, therefore, that he will have been in general agreement with Vasubandhu and the Sarvāstivādins on the *antarābhava* issue. It certainly seems unlikely that he would have adopted an idiosyncratic view in which consciousness exists independently of any physical

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[37] Buddhist cosmology does posit formless or 'immaterial' beings who are conscious but without any physical factors. Immaterial beings are exceptional cases in that the Theravādin accepted that there was no physical base to their consciousness and Sarvāstivādins did not consider them to have a physical aggregate. However, insofar as immaterial beings do not play a role in physical reality, their non-physical consciousness does not raise the kinds of problems that human and animal consciousness would if it had no physical basis. See Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, p.82 and Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma*, p.248,249.

[38] Hayes, 'Dharmakīrti on Punarbhava', p.118.

[39] Ibid., p.118n2.

[40] Ibid., p.118.

factors whatsoever. Given that Dharmakīrti's argument does not deny an intimate relationship between consciousness and physical reality, why does Thompson think that Dharmakīrti's approach can be so easily contrasted with that of the Vajrayāna system?

It is possible that a potential misunderstanding of Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth stems from his denial that consciousness is dependent upon the physical body. If we are not careful, we might take Dharmakīrti to be denying that human consciousness functions in dependence on any physical factors whatsoever. In fact, Dharmakīrti is not denying this. He is only denying, firstly, that consciousness can arise from physical factors alone, and secondly, that the arising of consciousness is dependent upon the functioning of the physical body. The second denial rejects the idea that consciousness is intimately connected with the physical body *as a whole* but does not reject the idea that consciousness is connected with physical factors located *within* or *throughout* the body. An *antarābhava*, for example, is a cluster of consciousness and physical factors that arises after the physical body has died and in which the mental and physical aggregates exist in dependence upon one another. If Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth denies that consciousness exists in a dependent relationship with any physical factors whatsoever, his argument will end up denying the possibility of an *antarābhava.* Insofar as Dharmakīrti's aim was to defend the general Buddhist conception of rebirth he would not have set out an argument that undermines one of the mechanisms by which rebirth was believed to occur.

Aside from the *antarābhava* issue there are good philosophical reasons why Dharmakīrti would not have wanted to argue for the complete independence of consciousness from physical factors. Irrespective of any particular tradition, a case can be made from the basic principles of Abhidharma philosophy for the inseparability of consciousness and some fundamental characteristics that are traditionally considered physical. These are principles with which Dharmakīrti would have been very familiar and which he would not have sought to undermine. In fact, the first premise of Dharmakīrti's argument, that consciousness and matter have distinct characteristics, is rooted in the

Abhidharma analysis of reality. This is why it is now important to explore this analysis and how it strengthens the premises of Dharmakīrti's argument.

4.4 Mental and Physical Dharmas

As we saw in Chapter Two, the earliest Buddhist philosophical systems, such as the Sarvāstivāda and Theravāda, analysed reality into fundamental distinct characteristics. A key principle behind this method of analysis was the Chariot Principle. According to this principle, wherever there are 'multiple distinguishable and distinct' parts, features, or characteristics that are jointly referred to as if they were a single entity, the reality must be that the entity in question is simply a conceptual label that 'picks out several distinct individuals together, without there being some one thing thus picked out.'[41] Just as a chariot is simply a label given to the parts that make it what it is, so too can every complex entity be analysed into the plurality of simple characteristics from which that entity has 'borrowed' its complex nature.[42] Ultimately, every complex phenomenon is nothing but a configuration of simple factors, called *dharmas.* A *dharma* is defined as that which has a particular *intrinsic* nature.[43] This intrinsic nature is not borrowed from anything more fundamental, it is simply what the particular dharma *is*. Dharmas are therefore taken to be the irreducible fundamentals of reality.

According to Abhidharma philosophy, dharmas are discovered by deducting conventional phenomena in order to see what is left. As explained by the Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*: 'Anything the idea of which does not occur upon division or upon mental analysis, such as an object like a pot, that is a conceptual fiction. The ultimately real is otherwise.'[44] Vasubandhu's claim is that a conceptual fiction is something that

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[41] Amber D. Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, Durham, Acumen, 2014, p.43.
[42] Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, Hackett Publishing, 2007, p.113.
[43] Ibid., p.111.
[44] Quoted in Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy,* p.111.

disappears from view once we have either literally or imaginatively separated it into the parts or characteristics that make it the way that it is. A pot is not ultimately real because, when it is broken into shards, there is no more pot. There is nothing intrinsically pot-like about the shards. We can also mentally take each of the pot's features in turn and recognise that none of these features involves the pot. For example, the colours of the pot are simply colours; the texture is just texture; the shape is just sections of extended material. None of these features have any intrinsic pot-ness to them and without them there is no pot. We can deduct pots from our vision of ultimate reality on the basis that they can be analysed into parts, features, and characteristics in which there is no "pot-ness".

Any characteristic that counts as a type of dharma will resist this process by remaining in at least one of the parts, features, or characteristics that we separate or analyse an entity into. Once more, as Vasubandhu explains:

> Where there is the idea even upon division, as well as upon exclusion of other properties by the mind, that is ultimately real. Like *rūpa* (physical things): even when it is divided up into atoms, and even when the mind takes away properties such as tastes and the like, there is still the intrinsic nature (svabhāva) of *rūpa*. Feeling, etc., should be seen in the same way. Because this exists in the highest sense, it is called ultimately real.[45]

According to Vasubandhu, the reason why there are physical dharmas and dharmas of feeling is because one cannot analyse them away by dividing them up or by mentally separating out their different parts, properties, or characteristics. Even when a physical object is divided into atoms, we are still left with something with basic physical characteristics. If you try to strip away every characteristic of matter you will eventually have to remove the intrinsic characteristics of *rūpa.* In this case you cannot analyse materiality into something more fundamental, you would simply have to eliminate it. You can

[45] Ibid., p.112.

only eliminate a dharma, you cannot smoothly reduce it to characteristics or parts in which the dharma is completely absent.

Within most Abhidharma systems, there were considered to be four fundamental characteristics of physical matter (*rūpa),* which were: movement, cohesion, temperature, and obstructive resistance. These were referred to using terms borrowed from the traditional Indian philosophical assumption that matter is fundamentally composed of four 'Great Elements' of 'wind' (movement), 'water' (cohesion), 'fire' (temperature), and 'earth' (resistance).[46]

The 'earth' characteristic, for example, denotes what we frequently encounter as obstructiveness. Once we strip away sensory qualities, movement, cohesion, and temperature from material objects we are left with a certain amount of spatially extended obstructiveness. This extended obstructiveness does not reduce smoothly into something non-extended, nor into something non-obstructive. Non-extended obstructiveness would not be any kind of obstructiveness at all because it would lack the extension needed to occupy, and so obstruct, a space. But the obstructiveness itself disappears when we strip away extension while extension alone is insufficient to produce obstructiveness. Nor can spatial extension be combined with some unknown factor in order to produce obstructiveness. The only thing that we can spatially extend in order to create an instance of obstructiveness is obstructiveness itself. Obstructiveness, resistance, or hardness must either be introduced wholesale into reality or eliminated from reality, it cannot be smoothly analysed into other elements, nor can it be constructed out of other elements.

Were it a conceptual fiction, obstructive resistance would borrow its nature from more fundamental characteristics. But it simply does not seem plausible that fundamental phenomena lacking the characteristic of obstructiveness would be able to provide *rūpa* with its distinctive obstructive characteristic. Even when we consider the fact that physicists generally understand atoms and their

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[46] Many Indian religions also considered space to be a fifth Great Element. See Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, p.163.

obstructive capacities in terms of magnetism, we can recognise that obstruction is intrinsic to the repelling relationship between particles with the same negative or positive charge. Instances of spatially-extended obstructiveness, or 'earth' dharmas, might therefore be a fundamental part of physics as well as Abhidharma philosophy. Likewise, according to the main Abhidharma systems, the other characteristics of matter that were stripped away to discover the 'earth' dharma can also be analysed in order to discover more physical dharma types.

Aside from physical characteristics (*rūpa*) Vasubandhu also suggests that pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feelings (*vedanā*) cannot be smoothly reduced to phenomena that completely lack these characteristics. There is 'something that it is like' to feel pleasant, unpleasant or disinterested and this phenomenal quality cannot be easily reduced to factors that are devoid of the phenomenal characteristics that make feelings what they are. And Vasubandhu will not have stopped at *rūpa* (physical form) and *vedanā* (feeling). All five of the aggregates, physical form, feeling, cognition (Pali: *saññā*, Sanskrit: *saṃjñā),* volition (Pali: *saṃkhāra*, Sanskrit: *saṃskāra,* or sometimes *cetanā*) and consciousness (Pali: *viññāṇa*, Sanskrit: *vijñāna*) were considered to be irreducible types of dharma for the same reasons: when we apply the Chariot Principle to ourselves, we find five types of characteristic phenomena and none of these phenomena reduce smoothly to further factors devoid of these characteristics.[47]

However, it is worth bearing in mind that we can accept the overall Abhidharma methodology without concluding that any one of the five aggregates must be considered to be an unanalysable dharma. It might turn out that there are a variety of irreducible, and perhaps inseparable, characteristics that make form, feeling, cognition, volition, and consciousness so distinctive.

[47] See Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, p.33.

But even if we do not fully accept the Abhidharma taxonomy of dharmas, we can still appreciate that the Chariot Principle helps us to recognise how phenomena such as pots, chariots, and persons borrow their natures from the distinctive characteristics or 'intrinsic natures' of more fundamental phenomena. The assumption underlying the Chariot Principle is that the apparent distinctiveness of certain phenomena reveals a genuine ontological distinctiveness, which is a distinctiveness rooted not just in the way things appear but rather in genuine reality. Wherever and whenever we recognise multiple distinctive and therefore different phenomena, analysis is possible, and this analysis reveals a plurality of features and characteristics. This is a valid assumption to make if we accept that nothing can be *apparently* distinctive without this apparent distinctiveness being something *real*. If a phenomenon appears within conscious experience, and it appears *as* having multiple distinct characteristics, its very appearance must depend on the arising of those distinctive characteristics.

For example, if we are going for a walk in the woods we might look up through the canopy and see the distinctive colours produced by the sunlight shining through the leaves. The green glow of each leaf involves a variety of distinctive visual characteristics, these are the phenomenal qualities involved in the visual experience of looking up into the forest canopy. These phenomenal qualities are genuine aspects of our conscious experience. If these qualities were not real *at all,* they would not even appear in our experience. The fact that they appear is proof enough that they are real and that their reality involves nothing less than their distinctive phenomenal characteristics. To say that these visual phenomena do not *really* have these distinctive characteristics is to fail to understand that the phenomena in question are appearances, they are subjective phenomena and so are precisely *what they seem to be*.[48] We cannot appeal to a distinction between the way that objects appear and what they really

[48] This is a point that had been made by Galen Strawson and Bertrand Russell before him. See Strawson, *Real Materialism,* p.41. See also Thomas Nagel, 'Subjective and objective', in *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1979, p.207.

are when we are dealing with phenomenal objects because phenomenal objects, such as the green glow of a sun-dappled leaf, are only real insofar as they appear to be something *within conscious experience*. This is why analysis of subjective phenomena should be taken as a reliable indicator that there are certain distinctive phenomenal qualities that constitute our conscious experience of the world.

Of course, a consequence of this approach is that the only way of knowing the distinctive characteristics that constitute reality is through conscious experience of them. Insofar as *dharmas* are simple phenomena, they cannot be known by description, they can only be known by acquaintance.[49] As Mark Siderits explains, we can 'know what is meant by the name for a certain *dharma* only through having direct experience of it.'[50] This places a great deal of weight on *consciousness* as a means of knowing the nature of reality. This is why it is so important for Buddhist philosophers to accept that consciousness is both *real* and also *reflexively self-aware*. Insofar as consciousness involves immediate awareness of both its own nature and the nature of its object, conscious experience becomes a paradigm case of directly knowing reality. This does, however, also limit our capacity to make claims about the intrinsic nature of dharmas that do not arise as part of conscious experiences.

For example, the distinctive characteristics of a colour such as red are known through our conscious experience of them. If we had never had a conscious experience of anything red, we could not claim to be acquainted with "redness". Furthermore, there does not seem to be another means by which this "redness" might come to be known if we cannot have a conscious experience of it. This has been most clearly illustrated in Frank Jackson's famous essay in which he

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[49] The question of whether we are truly acquainted with the intrinsic nature of our experiences is currently a hotly debated one within philosophy of mind. Nevertheless, powerful arguments in favour of the view that we are genuinely acquainted with the nature of experiences have and continue to be made. For an excellent defence of this view see Philip Goff, 'Real Acquaintance and Physicalism', in *Phenomenal Qualities: Sense, Perception and Consciousness,* Paul Coates and Sam Coleman (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2015.

[50] Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy,* p.113.

introduces Mary, a brilliant colour scientist raised in a black and white environment. She learns everything physics can tell her about colour, including how it is processed by the human brain, from black and white books in a black and white world (even she herself is frequently made-up so as to remain colourless). Eventually she is allowed to enter the world of colour for the first time and sees a red rose.[51] It seems plausible to suggest that Mary encounters "redness" for the first time in virtue of her conscious experience of it. Whatever particular types of dharma constitute "redness", they can only be known through direct conscious experience of them.

However, there might be features of reality that *cannot* arise within conscious experience. If this is the case, their definitive characteristics may remain unknown simply because no direct acquaintance with their nature is possible.[52] For example, although obstructiveness involves a phenomenal quality with which we can become acquainted through experience, the full nature of physical reality might be beyond the scope of Abhidharma analysis if the full range of physical characteristics includes thoroughly non-phenomenal ones. This issue will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Nevertheless, what is most important for the coherence of the Abhidharma philosophical position is that consciousness has distinct characteristics that make it capable of illuminating and thus revealing the nature of other phenomena. This ties into Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth, which relies upon the claim that consciousness has characteristics that distinguish it from physical phenomena. For Dharmakīrti, consciousness is distinct from other phenomena because, somewhat like open space, it is capable of illuminating diverse objects, as well as itself, without these objects excluding each other. The claim that consciousness is like space acquires some plausibility when we consider

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[51] Frank Jackson, 'Epiphenomenal Qualia', *Philosophical Quarterly,* Vol. 32, April, 1982, pp.127-136.

[52] For more on *direct* or *real acquaintance* with phenomenal qualities such as colour, see Philip Goff, 'Real Acquaintance and Physicalism', *Phenomenal Qualities: Sense, Perception and Consciousness,* Paul Coates and Sam Coleman (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2015.

that each phenomenal quality involved in an experience, such as walking in the woods, is able to appear together with the others. This is akin to the fact that every spatial object is able to occupy its own position within the inclusive expanse of space. In this way consciousness involves the appearance of multiple phenomenal qualities together in a single "phenomenal space", so to speak.

Consciousness can be characterised as a phenomenal space because multiple phenomenal qualities can and do appear together as part of a single conscious experience. Multiple colours, sounds, shapes, smells, sensations, and much more are known in a single conscious experience. Even if these different phenomenal qualities are *apprehended* one at a time, they do not *appear* one at a time. If each quality appeared as a conscious experience one at a time we would only ever think that there was a single such quality in existence: the one that we are experiencing *right now*. If a walk in the woods appeared as a sequence of singular atomic phenomenal qualities we would never experience *the walk in the woods*.

This, however, does not rule out the position taken within most Abhidharma schools that consciousness apprehends one object at a time.[53] This is because these Abhidharma schools considered memory to be the key factor in giving rise to our sense that we apprehend multiple objects all at once.[54] The mainstream Abhidharma view is that our awareness of objects involves at least two distinct processes: the apprehension of one basic phenomenon at a time, followed by the conceptual construction (*vikalpa*) of these into complex objects.[55] Some form of conscious retention is essential to the second process insofar as each basic phenomenon must remain within awareness long enough to be conceptually constructed into the complex objects that appear to us.

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[53] See Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma,* pp.68-75. See also Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma,* pp.273-287.

[54] See Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, pp.106,107. See also Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma,* pp.343-345.

[55] See Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma,* pp.296-299. See also Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, p.141.

Abhidharma philosophers must accept such a view in order to account for the fact that objects appear as if they are arising within our awareness simultaneously.

Therefore, even if our experiences *are* initially apprehended as a stream of basic phenomena, at some point these phenomena must get "stuck" in a single conscious experience long enough for there to be a complex experience involving a multitude of objects, characteristics, and qualities. Our knowledge of multiple phenomena must come from the appearance of these phenomena together in a single inclusive conscious experience, even if all but one of these phenomena has been retained from the past. Whether consciousness includes multiple objects by apprehending them simultaneously within a "space of awareness" or whether it includes multiple objects by *retaining* them, phenomenal consciousness has distinctive characteristics in virtue of which it includes multiple objects within a conscious experience.

However, insofar as phenomenal consciousness consists of inclusive as well as object-and-self-illuminating characteristics, it seems that we cannot consider it to be a dharma. Insofar as a dharma is an absolutely simple and unanalysable type of characteristics, any phenomenon with multiple distinct characteristics cannot be a dharma.

Within Abhidharma systems, consciousness is considered to be a dharma because some of the features mentioned so far are taken to be separate from consciousness-proper. For example, the capacity of consciousness to include or retain multiple objects is not taken to be an aspect of consciousness within most Abhidharma systems. This capacity is considered separable from the illuminating character that defines consciousness. Of course, without the inclusive characteristic, consciousness would only illuminate one absolutely simple phenomena at a time. Nonetheless, according to many Abhidharma systems what remained would still be consciousness, albeit very simple atomic consciousness. We would not have dissolved consciousness by stripping out

its ability to include diverse phenomena.[56] What would remain would be the definitive character of consciousness, its illumination of other entities, objects or qualities such that they appear in conscious experience.

However, even if we were to ultimately conclude that consciousness is distinct from its capacity to include or retain multiple objects, it remains both *self and other illuminating*. Phenomenal consciousness is distinctive insofar as it illuminates other features of reality such that they appear as *phenomenal* features for which there is 'something it is like' for them to exist. And this other-illuminating character cannot be separated from the self-illuminating reflexivity of phenomenal consciousness. As argued at the beginning of the chapter, attempts to separate phenomenal consciousness as object-directed from phenomenal consciousness as reflexively self-aware do not work. To be aware of objects *as phenomena* is to be aware *of the very fact of their appearing*, and awareness of this fact is awareness of the subjective, first-person perspective in which they appear.[57] Even if there were only a single simple phenomenal quality appearing within conscious experience, its appearance must be known *as* an appearance in order for the quality, as a *phenomenal* quality, to appear. In order for even the most basic experience to be possible, for example the experience of phenomenal redness, there must also be awareness of this appearance of redness. The phenomenally conscious experience of redness is an appearance *as if to a subject* and so cannot avoid including, within itself, the consciousness of the experience *as phenomenally conscious, subjective experience.* This is why we cannot separate the self-illuminating aspect of consciousness from its other-illuminating aspect.

The question this raises for anyone using the Abhidharma methodology is whether self-illuminating and other-illuminating consciousness must be two different phenomena, two different types of dharma. It seems that to claim that

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[56] In the forthcoming chapters I shall argue that the inclusive aspect of phenomenal consciousness cannot be stripped out at all but for brevity this substantial argument will be saved for later.

[57] Zahavi, 'The Experiential Self: Objections and Clarifications', p.60.

consciousness is intrinsically self-illuminating would require that it was either a type of *complex dharma* or otherwise a *conceptual fiction* composed of at least two types of dharma. The same question arises if it turns out that consciousness has the intrinsic capacity to include or retain multiple objects.

However, if we review Vasubandhu's approach to Abhidharma methodology, we find that he does not emphasise *simplicity* as a criterion of being ultimately real. Rather, he leaves room for the possibility that a phenomenon might be neither a conceptual fiction nor an absolutely simple dharma. A conceptual fiction is a phenomenon that disappears when we imaginatively or literally separate it into constituent features. But we could encounter a phenomenon that is a complex of multiple characteristics but in which none of these characteristics can be taken separately. This seems to be true of the illuminating characteristics that make consciousness distinctive. Insofar as the illumination of an object involves its appearance as if to a subject, and this appearance involves an awareness of the illuminating awareness itself, there can be no other-illumination in the absence of self-illumination. Likewise there can be no self-illumination if there is no object being illuminated. Here we have a case where you cannot even imagine the two types of illumination as separate phenomena. Nonetheless they can be distinguished as different characteristics. The complex phenomenon of self-and-other-illumination does not disappear under analysis because both features remain firmly intertwined. Here we have a case of an ultimately real complex phenomenon.

At this point we could consider revising our definition of a dharma so that it does not need to be a simple and unanalysable type of characteristic. Such a revision would not only take us quite far from the principles of Abhidharma methodology, it is also unnecessary. We can instead accept as ultimately real not only the most simple dharmas but also those indivisible clusters of dharmas in which none of the characteristics could exist in isolation from the others. These absolutely indivisible clusters meet Vasubandhu's criteria for being ultimately real whilst not being absolutely simple. Such clusters are not conceptual fictions because it is not our conceptualising alone that brings them together as one thing. Rather, the mutual dependence of each factor within the cluster means

that they always arise together, regardless of our conceptual activity. And yet, these clusters are not dharmas because they are complex configurations of more basic factors.

If we adopt Vasubandhu's particular definition of a conceptual fiction, we can maintain that phenomenal consciousness is intrinsically self-and-other-illuminating without considering it to be a conceptual fiction. This also leaves room for phenomenal consciousness to have a range of intrinsic features that are absolutely inseparable from one another. Whilst this would mean that phenomenal consciousness could not be considered a type of dharma, its existence could not be said to be a matter of mere conceptualisation. Insofar as *every* distinctive characteristics of phenomenal consciousness disappears from view when we try to take any one of them separately, we cannot say that it disappears under analysis in the way that a pot does.

According to Dharmakīrti, consciousness can illuminate diverse objects whilst also illuminating itself. This is what distinguishes the characteristics of consciousness, at a fundamental level, from physical characteristics. Furthermore, like obstructiveness, the characteristics of phenomenal consciousness must either be introduced wholesale into reality or eliminated from reality, it cannot be smoothly analysed into other elements, nor can it be constructed out of other elements. This irreducibility is the major reason why Abhidharma systems considered phenomenal consciousness to be a dharma. But even if Dharmakīrti's characterisation of consciousness makes it too complex to be considered a dharma, this does not negate the fact that its distinctive characteristics cannot be analysed or separated into further non-conscious factors. And whilst the application of the Chariot Principle reveals the ways in which phenomenal consciousness is a distinct feature of reality, the Cluster Principle gives us reasons to believe it is nonetheless inseparable from other aspects of reality, as we shall now see.

4.5 Inseparable Dharmas of Consciousness and Physicality

As discussed already, in *Waking Dreaming Being,* Evan Thompson contrasts Dharmakīrti's claim that consciousness and physical factors are distinct with the claim, coming from the Vajrayāna system, that a subtle physical energy with characteristics of 'mobility, dynamism, and cohesion', is *inseparable* from the core characteristics of consciousness.[58] The characteristics of mobility, dynamism or 'wind' and cohesion or 'water' are also included as fundamental physical factors within Abhidharma systems. Along with consciousness, mobility and cohesion were classified as dharmas.[59] But despite considering these phenomena to have fundamentally distinct natures, the Abhidharmikas did not consider these dharmas to exist as separate realities. Abhidharma principles rule this out thanks to what I have called the Cluster Principle. According to this principle, any distinct phenomenon, whether it is a dharma or not, never arises on its own but is always part of a cluster along with other dharmas.[60] This is because it is the nature of dharmas to be connected to one another.

If we were to apply the Chariot Principle to everything in our reality and were left with completely basic or "subtle" characteristics, which couldn't be analysed into further distinguishable aspects, these basic characteristics would not exist as separate particles of reality.[61] If reality was composed of intrinsically isolated particles, their composition and configuration into complexes would not be possible for the simple reason that each dharma would be, by its very nature, separate. Therefore, insofar as our reality is constituted by multiple distinct

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[58] Thompson, *Waking Dreaming Being*, p.83. See also Dalai Lama, *Universe in a single atom*, p.110.

[59] Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma,* p.250. See also Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma,* pp.153,154.

[60] As previously mentioned, this analysis of reality is common to the two earliest major Abhidharma systems, the Sarvāstivāda and the Theravāda. See Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma,* pp.255,275. See also Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, pp.76-83, 205-210.

[61] Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, pp.20-22. See also Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, p.259.

characteristics, the only way that this is possible is if each of these distinct dharmas has an intrinsic connection to other dharmas.

A genuine dharma must have an intrinsic connection with at least one other dharma in order for it to have any relationship, even if only indirectly, to the other dharmas that exist. In fact, according to Abhidharma systems, every dharma must be intrinsically connected to more than just *one* other dharma. For both the Sarvāstivādins and Theravādins, the smallest possible cluster of *physical* dharmas consists of *eight* distinct factors. This includes one dharma belonging to each of the four 'Great Elements' of 'wind' (movement), 'water' (cohesion), 'fire' (temperature), and 'earth' (resistance).[62] When it comes to the smallest possible cluster of *mental* dharmas, the Theravādins take the minimum to be eight factors again while for the Sarvāstivādins the minimum is *eleven* distinct factors.[63] Within both systems any mental cluster always includes a dharma of consciousness.[64]

Regardless of the particularities of each Abhidharma system, the fundamental Abhidharma position is that any individual dharma can only ever arise within a configuration or cluster of dharmas in which each dharma is inseparable from the others. This is why, in accordance with the Cluster Principle, neither a dharma of consciousness, nor one of mobility, cohesion, temperature, or resistance could exist in isolation from other dharmas. In order to make a difference to reality as a whole, each dharma must arise in configuration with others. For such configuration to be possible, the intrinsic character of each dharma must enable it to arise in an inseparable cluster with other dharmas of a different character type. The way in which a particular type of dharma arises with another type of dharma must be part of the *very nature* of that type of dharma. And so, if each and every dharma is of the nature to arise in intimate configuration with at least some others, and if every dharma has a concrete

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[62] See Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, p.206 and Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, p.262.
[63] See Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, p.99.
[64] See Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, p.71 and Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, p.294.

impact on the way that reality as a whole is, it follows that every dharma must be connected to every other, even if some dharmas are only connected to others through intermediate dharmas. Therefore, the mental dharma of consciousness and the physical dharmas of mobility, cohesion, temperature, and resistance, both as individual dharmas and as types of dharma, were considered to be fundamentally connected to one another, either directly or indirectly through connections to other dharmas.

If we now reflect on the core characteristics of consciousness we can examine the specific reasons why phenomenal consciousness cannot exist separately from the rest of reality. The key characteristic here is the fact that phenomenal consciousness is always consciousness *of* something. Conscious experience always involves consciousness of those factors that constitute 'what it is like' for there to be conscious experience. If phenomenal consciousness were not consciousness *of* anything other than itself, there would be nothing constituting 'what it is like' for consciousness to exist. Purely self-illuminating phenomenal consciousness could not simply illuminate its own characteristics because phenomenal consciousness has no characteristics aside from those that arise during the illumination of *other* characteristics. This is why the arising of purely self-aware consciousness would not involve any phenomenal characteristics or qualities. There would be nothing that it was like to be conscious in this case. Such consciousness would not be phenomenal consciousness because it would not involve the appearance of phenomena and so would not illuminate or disclose anything at all. Such a consciousness would be devoid of any distinct character or defining features and so could not even be said to exist *as* anything in particular.

For the Abhidharma philosopher, to exist is to be something in particular, to have a defining character. This is a minimal standard for saying that something exists, it requires only that an entity makes some difference to what reality is. But if the existence of an entity makes no difference to reality, we should probably join the Abhidharma philosophers in denying its existence. This is the reason why it would make sense to reject the possibility of a consciousness that illuminates nothing at all. A mere potential to illuminate lacks any particular,

concrete characteristics and so would lack the minimal degree of definition required to exist. To exist, consciousness must arise in a cluster with phenomenal qualities that constitute a particular conscious experience. For this reason, if we were to separate consciousness out into its object-directedness and its phenomenal quality, neither feature would amount to anything in particular and so could not be said to exist.

Therefore, regardless of whether it is a single dharma or an indivisible cluster, phenomenal consciousness must involve the illumination of objects, which encompasses object-directedness, a certain phenomenal character, and the reflexive self-illumination that comes as a necessary corollary of this. Every instance of phenomenal consciousness would thus always be directed towards and illuminate an object. There is, however, an additional claim made within most Abhidharma systems, which is that only a single basic phenomenon can be apprehended in each instance of conscious apprehension. If this were the case, each instance of object-directed consciousness would be extremely short-lived.[65] An instance of phenomenal consciousness, its basic object, and any memory of past objects, would arise and cease together as a single brief occurrence of conscious apprehension. A similar position is also taken by constitutive panpsychists, as we shall explore in the next chapter.[66]

Nevertheless, even if consciousness arises in short-lived instances, each with a single object, such instances must arise in a series that illuminates multiple phenomenal objects over a period of time. This would have to happen in order for it to even *appear* as if different phenomena are arising within a single consciousness at different times. And this certainly is how conscious experiences appear to elapse. For example, the experience of listening to

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[65] See Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, pp.20-22. See also Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma,* pp.273-287.

[66] See Galen Strawson, 'Realistic Monism', in *Real Materialism and other essays,* Oxford University Press, 2008, p.72.See also Sam Coleman, 'The Real Combination Problem: Panpsychism, Micro-Subjects, and Emergence', *Erkenntnis*, Vol. 79, No. 1, February, 2014, p.24.

birdsong appears as if it is being experienced by a single conscious witness who is aware of the different “tweets” elapsing over time.

Two distinctive types of continuity are required in order for experiences like this to be possible. Firstly, each occurrence of conscious apprehension must be followed by another that “picks up where the last left off” so to speak. Any change on the side of the object must be met with a corresponding occurrence of consciousness in order for there to be the kind of *stream* of consciousness required for the experience of birdsong. Secondly, subsequence occurrences of conscious apprehension must include the object of the previous occurrence. This is required in order for birdsong, which elapses over many moments, to be experienced *as if by a single observer.* Each instance of conscious apprehension must be retained in future instances in order for temporal experiences like this to be possible. Substantial argument will be presented in the following chapters in order to make the case that both forms of continuity are exhibited in the case of phenomenal consciousness. This argument will aim to support the key premises of Dharmakīrti’s argument for rebirth.

However, if Dharmakīrti’s approach to consciousness presents it as existing independently of physical reality, the question of how consciousness is able to influence the physical without creating noticeable scientific anomalies is difficult to answer. This is why it is important to accept that each instance in a continuous stream of phenomenal consciousness must be intimately connected to physical reality. In order to discover this connection between instances of consciousness and instances of physicality, we should search for the factor responsible for bringing such factors together.

Insofar as we are able to consciously experience and respond to the physical world, there must be a factor or factors that act as the intermediary between consciousness and the physical. But such an intermediary would be capable of influencing physical factors and so would have to already have been incorporated, in some form, into current scientific models of the physical universe. If such an intermediary were not incorporated in this way, we would expect significant anomalies to have been discovered within the bodies and brains of conscious organisms. That such anomalies do not seem to have

arisen suggests that the intermediary factor that allows consciousness to experience and influence the physical world has already been incorporated into current scientific models. And, insofar as such an intermediary factor must have already been incorporated into current physical models, we are quite justified in calling such a factor a *physical* factor.

Within the Vajrayāna system, this physical intermediary factor is identified as *prāṇa,* the subtle physical energy with characteristics of 'mobility, dynamism, and cohesion', that is *inseparable* from the core characteristics of consciousness. Within Abhidharma systems, the characteristic of mobility, or 'wind', is the dynamic factor or impetus that gives rise to physical dharma clusters in new locations while cohesion, or 'water', is the factor that holds these clusters together.[67] But despite the fact that the Abhidharmikas consider 'wind' and 'water' to arise only in *physical* clusters, similar factors must be operating within *mental* clusters. Insofar as consciousness is a distinct feature of reality that arises with different objects at different times and in different places, there must be dynamic factors that determine this "movement" from object to object, from place to place. While any particular occurrence of consciousness arises and ceases rapidly, its successor can arise with a different object in a different place. This is how Abhidharma systems understand what is best described as the movement of consciousness. This movement would not be possible if consciousness arose in configurations devoid of the impetus required to drive the arising of consciousness with a new object in a new place. While the aspects of intentional object-directedness and reflexive self-awareness define any occurrence of consciousness, such occurrences arise in streams of awareness in which different objects are apprehended at different times. All conscious activities occur within this kind of dynamic stream of awareness.

However, according to Abhidharma systems consciousness is simply one type of dharma that is capable of arising in different configurations at different times. Dharmas of many different types must be able to arise in varying configurations

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[67] See Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, pp.164-166.

over time, otherwise the world would involve nothing but the same repeating configurations of dharmas forever. In such a reality, every instant would involve the same characteristics existing in the same places forever. We can quite easily verify that this is not our reality. Therefore, while the dharmas within a given cluster are inseparable from one another, there must be *at least some* types of dharma that are able to arise with a range of different dharma types at different times.

This is why the characteristics of mobility and cohesion would have to be ubiquitous characteristics in a world of dharmas. In a world of dharmas that are capable of arising in *cohesive* configurations, a dharma of cohesion would have to be inseparable from *every dharma* that arose *cohesively* with another, including both physical dharmas and conscious mental dharmas. The same would be true for mobility or movement. While Abhidharma theories, particularly those of the Sarvāstivāda, deny that a dharma can move from one place to another, they do not deny that, over time, dharmas of a given type will cease to arise in one place and begin to arise in another.[68] The capacity for dharmas of a particular type to arise in one configuration and then another can only be accurately characterised as a form of mobility. In a world of dharmas there would be a movement of characteristics, though not individual dharmas, from one configuration to another. Therefore, the characteristic of movement would have to be inseparable from every configuration of dharmas.

Insofar as movement and cohesion are taken to be physical characteristics within Abhidharma systems it makes sense, given the fact that they ultimately seem to be ubiquitous, that the Vajrayāna system came to consider mobility

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[68] For simplicity's sake I am overlooking the fact that the Sarvāstivādins had a very complex and ingenious theory of time in which dharmas of the past, present and future exist simultaneously. The flow of time, for the Sarvāstivāda, is not due to the arising and ceasing of dharmas but rather is due to a change in their 'mode of being' as their relationship to the different temporal phases changes. Even within such a system, the past, present, and future 'modes of being' could be said to move from one set of dharmas to another. This is (in brief) my justification for taking the Sarvāstivāda to ultimately accept that movement occurs in some form. See Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma,* pp.148,149.

and cohesion to be physical characteristics that arise with *every* dharma, including conscious mental ones. The Abhidharma claim that mobility and cohesion are physical characteristics can be found in the Vajrayāna system but with the added claim that these *physical* characteristics arise along with every instance of consciousness. And, as mentioned above, there must be a physical intermediary factor between consciousness and physical reality in order to account for the lack of anomalies in scientific models.

Instances of consciousness arise together with their object. In Abhidharma terms this means that consciousness of physical objects involves the arising of conscious mental dharmas with physical dharmas. So unless consciousness never actually apprehends a physical dharma, there must be a factor that gives rise to physical and conscious mental dharmas in combination. Physical and conscious mental dharmas must also arise together if they are ever to directly condition one another. Unless conscious mental events never directly influence physical dharmas, an intermediary factor must bring the conscious and physical dharma streams together. And insofar as this factor plays an active role in the arising of physical dharmas, it would be highly problematic if its effects were taken to have completely escaped the notice of those who are studying physical reality. This is why we would call such a factor *physical.*

However, if we wish to deny the Vajrayāna claim and adopt a position closer to Abhidharma systems, we could maintain that physical objects are apprehended and influenced *indirectly* through intermediary *mental* factors. In order to act as intermediaries, mental factors of this type would have to be devoid of consciousness when arising in combination with the physical factors that they influence and are influenced by. They would then arise with consciousness when they influenced and were influenced by consciousness. The problem here is that every cluster of mental factors, according to most Abhidharma systems, arises with a dharma of consciousness.[69] Intermediary mental factors would

[69] See Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, p.71 and Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, p.294.

have to be mental factors devoid of consciousness. Attempting to adopt a position closer to the Abhidharma which ends up contradicting the Abhidharma seems counterproductive, especially when we consider that an indirect approach to explaining consciousness of physical objects is so much more complicated.

Overall, it is consistent with Abhidharma *principles* if not the exact positions of particular Abhidharma *systems* to claim that instances of consciousness arise continually with instances of other types, including factors that we could justifiably call “physical”. This does not call into question the fundamental distinction between mental and physical characteristics. Furthermore, as was explored in the second part of the chapter, the view that instances of consciousness are inseparable from physical factors can be found in one form or another within the Sarvāstivāda and Theravāda Abhidharma systems, it is also adhered to by those Buddhist philosophers such as Vasubandhu (and possibly Dharmakīrti) who accepted *antarābhava.* The Vajrayāna system is not alone in advocating such a position.

Insofar as such a position is accepted, it is possible to explain how two-way causation between consciousness and the rest of physical reality could work within a traditional Buddhist account. According to this account, the unfolding of physical phenomena involves characteristics of ‘wind’ (mobility) and ‘water’ (cohesion) which also influence the arising of consciousness with different objects. Insofar as consciousness is intrinsically other-illuminating, it is a world-involving and world-influencing phenomenon. This written document is an example of a physical phenomenon that has arisen due to the distinctive characteristics of consciousness. This entire project is about the nature of consciousness and involves the production of a physical document that will nonetheless be a product of consciousness. But this does not require that consciousness is reducible to physical phenomena, nor that consciousness could arise from purely physical phenomena. It only requires that the fundamental features of reality, such as consciousness, arise in clusters of distinct but mutually conditioning factors.

The suggestion that there are physical factors that are inseparable from consciousness does not, in any way, undermine Dharmakīrti's premise that physical factors cannot be the substantial causes (Sanskrit: *sabhāga-hetu*) for the arising of consciousness. Insofar as 'wind' denotes the fundamental characteristic of impetus, 'water' the characteristic of cohesion, and consciousness the fundamental characteristics of intentional reflexive awareness, these factors cannot be the causes of one another's distinctive character. But this does not rule out their being inseparable or mutually conditioning. There can be an intermediary physical factor that is responsible for producing *the combination of* consciousness with a particular physical object without this factor alone creating the intrinsic nature of the object-directed consciousness that arises.

The process of giving rise to the combination of consciousness with a physical object might, in turn, condition the intermediary physical factor itself. In this way, a particular instance of consciousness would influence the intermediary physical factor without actually generating new physical energy. Neither of these two factors would be producing the other but they would nonetheless be conditioning how the other arises in future. And if this sort of conditioning relationship occurs frequently enough, those observing physical phenomena would not register an anomaly because this would simply be the way in which the intermediary physical factor normally behaves.

Of course, if there is a factor that acts as the intermediary between consciousness and physical objects, we can ask whether this factor is detectable using scientific instruments. Evan Thompson suggests that neuroscience may in fact have already discovered the subtle physical basis for consciousness. Following the work of neuroscientists Roman Bauer and Norman Cook, Thompson suggests that perhaps this basis may well be the electromagnetic field generated by the living cells of the brain.[70] Changes in

[70] See Roman Bauer, 'In Search of a Neural Signature of Consciousness – Facts, Hypotheses, and Proposals,' in *Synthese,* pp.233-245, Vol. 141, 2004. See also N. D. Cook, 'The Neuron Level Phenomena Underlying Cognition and Consciousness:

this dynamic field correlate with changes experienced by conscious subjects, making it possible that the dynamics of this field determine the objects that appear to consciousness.[71]

However, insofar as Thompson identifies the subtle physical basis of consciousness with the electromagnetic fields of the brain, he deviates from the Vajrayāna perspective that he favours. The Vajrayāna system identifies the physical basis of consciousness with the fundamental characteristics of mobility and cohesion. As in most Abhidharma systems, within the Vajrayāna mobility and cohesion are recognised as irreducible characteristics that cannot dissolve, degrade or dissipate along with the complex forces generated within a living organism. If we recall Vasubandhu's criteria for being ultimately real, the fact that the electromagnetic field of the brain borrows its characteristics from those more basic physical factors into which it dissipates means that it must be considered a conceptual fiction. In contrast, even if mobility and cohesion are not absolutely simple dharmas they cannot, according to the Vajrayāna and Abhidharma systems, dissolve into separable factors.

According to Vajrayāna accounts, when a person dies, gross modes of sensory consciousness dissolve into more subtle states as brain function ceases. The collapse of gross consciousness is mirrored by the dissolution or collapse of gross physical energies into more subtle forces. Once this dissolution has been completed the fundamental physical basis of consciousness is still intact because it cannot dissolve any further. This is very similar to accounts given regarding the *antarābhava,* which arises after the death of the organism as an indivisible configuration of mental and physical factors. As it is described in the Vajrayāna account, subtle energy is more fundamental than the gross forms of the body and so survives death.[72] The subtle consciousness that remains after death continues to arise with this fundamental energy and, in line with the

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Synaptic Activity and the Action Potential,' in *Neuroscience,* pp.556-570, Vol. 153, 2008.

[71] Thompson, *Waking Dreaming Being,* 2015, pp.342,343.

[72] Ibid., pp.84-86.

traditional cosmological view, both the subtle consciousness and the subtle energy eventually develop into gross forms as part of a new organism. In this way we can see how the Vajrayāna account does not undermine the core purpose of Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth. Both Dharmakīrti and the Vajrayāna Tantric Buddhist support their belief in rebirth through the claim that consciousness and any physical factors that are inseparable from consciousness are more fundamental than the bio-chemical processes of a living organism.

4.6 Consciousness and Objective Evidence

In *Waking Dreaming Being,* Thompson favours the Vajrayāna approach to consciousness over Dharmakīrti's. He is not convinced by the metaphysical arguments put forward for the view that consciousness can exist independently of the brain. One of the main motivating factors behind Thompson considering the Vajrayāna system to be superior to Dharmakīrti's approach is his perception that the former is based more on the observation of meditators than on the philosophical arguments of earlier schools. Thompson considers this increased emphasis on meditative experience to bring the Vajrayāna system closer to the empirical methods that he favours.

However, Thompson is wary of the influence that traditional metaphysical positions can have on the observations reported by Buddhist meditators. On the one hand, Thompson is convinced that the kinds of observations of subtle consciousness from Vajrayāna practitioners are based on honest accounts by highly accomplished meditators. On the other hand he is aware that these accounts will involve interpretation based on the system of thought in which their observations were based. According to Thompson, the view that the most basic consciousness is not dependent upon the brain must be taken as a metaphysical interpretation of experience. He can see no way in which observation alone could justify this claim. He also points out that such a claim is the result of Buddhism's interaction with modern science given that before

this encounter Buddhists had little, if anything, to say about the brain as a cognitive system.[73]

Furthermore, he states that claims made based on meditative experiences rely on the assumption that such experiences are capable of providing information about the neural supports of experience. Such an assumption is unwarranted because experiences do not reveal anything about the neural activity that supports them. This relates to the fact that, as previously mentioned, the intrinsic nature of *dharmas* can only be known through direct experience of them. This means that meditators could use their direct experiences to support their claims about the nature of the phenomena that arise in conscious experience but when it comes to claims about non-experiential phenomena, such as the neural supports of experience, meditators would not be able to rely on direct experience. Thompson's point is that consciousness could be dependent upon physical factors that do not appear within conscious experience. This means that the dependence relationship between consciousness and the brain might go completely unrecognised by even the most adept meditator.[74]

Nevertheless, Thompson's wariness about the potential influence that metaphysical positions might have on investigators should be applied to meditators and neuroscientists alike. One can just as easily say that holding all subjective experiences to be dependent upon the brain is also a metaphysical interpretation of experience. Just because changes in neural activity correspond to changes in subjective experience, this does not prima facie tell us that there is a dependence relationship. It only tells us that, barring coincidence, they are clearly interrelated. Neuroscience has yet to explain how neural activity can give rise to the subjective character of experience.[75] Such

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[73] Ibid., pp.89,90.
[74] Ibid., pp.91-96.
[75] See David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, Oxford University Press, 1997, p.115. See also the work of Raymond Tallis, especially 'What Neuroscience Cannot Tell Us About Ourselves', *The New Atlantis,* pp.3-15, No.29, Fall, 2010.

theories are currently the province of philosophy, specifically the metaphysics of mind.

But Thompson is not ignorant of this fact. He is simply aware that neuroscience operates from certain basic assumptions, as he makes explicit:

> From the neuroscience perspective, if highly realized meditators with functioning brains can directly experience pure awareness, then the working assumption is that pure awareness is contingent on the brain.[76]

The working assumption is that having a functioning brain means that all experiences are contingent upon its functioning. Even though, as Thompson explains, 'the specific neuronal systems and functions on which pure awareness is supposed to be contingent are unknown to us at present', the assumption is that pure awareness is nevertheless contingent on neuronal systems and functions.[77] This assumption can only be challenged by evidence for the existence of a pure brain-independent consciousness. Ultimately, in this case, the burden of proof is on the Buddhist 'to give positive evidence that consciousness isn't contingent on the brain.'[78]

Empirical proof for either the existence or the non-existence of consciousness independent of the brain would require a reliable, objective method for detecting consciousness itself.[79] The detection of brain-independent consciousness using such a method would potentially overturn the current working assumption of neuroscience. On the other hand, the failure of this method to detect consciousness without a functioning brain would act as evidence for the non-existence of such an independent consciousness. As it stands, the only means by which we are able to detect phenomenal consciousness directly is in our

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[76] Thompson, *Waking Dreaming Being*, p.92.
[77] Ibid., p.93.
[78] Ibid., p.93.
[79] David Chalmers has mentioned the need for a 'consciousness meter' in order to get direct access to consciousness. See 'On the Search for the Neural Correlate of Consciousness' in *Toward a Science of Consciousness II: The Second Tucson Discussions and Debates*, Stuart Hameroff, Alfred Kaszniak, and Alwyn Scott, (eds.), MIT Press, 1998, p.220.

own individual cases, via the reflexivity of consciousness. This method is thoroughly subjective insofar as each of us is only "self" aware, we do not detect each other's consciousnesses directly. The only way that a consciousness existing independently of a functioning brain could be detected in this way would be via the reflexivity of the brain-independent consciousness itself. The problem here is that only the brain-independent consciousness would have access to the evidence of its existence. Without a functioning brain, there is no way to communicate the discovery of this evidence to others.[80]

An objective method for detecting consciousness would have to be completely different from reflexivity in order to be reliable and objective. We would be looking for an objective phenomenon, observable by multiple people, which would reliably react to the presence of consciousness. The problem with making use of such a method is that we would need to know where to look for brain-independent consciousness. If we were to possess an objective, physical means to detect consciousness, we would also need an objective, physical location in which to seek brain-independent consciousness. The existence of consciousness existing independently of a functioning brain cannot be ruled out on the grounds that nobody knows where to look for it. On the other hand, until we have objective, reliable means to detect brain-independent consciousness *and* an idea of where to seek it out, the burden of proof falls on those who want to prove that the as-yet undetected phenomenon *does* exist.[81]

However, if it is claimed that the only admissible evidence for brain-independent consciousness must come from an objective consciousness detector, it would be inconsistent not to demand the same standard of evidence in the case of claims for the existence of other types of phenomenal consciousness.

But when you or I are dealing with other living humans with functioning brains, we take them to be phenomenally conscious without first requiring that we can

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[80] It (almost) goes without saying that the Buddhist claim that consciousness can exist independently of the brain does not involve the assumption that such a consciousness has the capacity to communicate the fact of its existence to others.

[81] Thompson, *Waking Dreaming Being,* 2015, pp.95,96.

directly detect this phenomenal consciousness. Because we lack an objective way to measure such consciousness directly, we rely on what we take to be phenomenally conscious behaviour such as verbal reports and expressions of emotion or cognitive activity. We normally perceive such behaviours as expressions of a phenomenally conscious mind rather than as simply a series of physical events. Yet our observation of another does not involve a direct experience of those subjective characteristics that constitute the *phenomenal* quality of their phenomenal consciousness. And yet, recognising this absence of direct experience is not enough to undermine our confidence in our perception of other people as phenomenally conscious.

Within contemporary analytic philosophy of mind there are a range of views as to what is happening when we take others to have conscious minds. There are two major approaches, which disagree as to whether we *simulate* the conscious minds of others using our own case or whether instead we, at some point in our development, adopt a *theory* according to which both ourselves and others have minds.[82] Despite their disagreements, both approaches agree that we do not directly experience the minds of others, only their behaviour. The deeper debate is between both of these approaches and a third approach coming from the phenomenological tradition. This debate is touched upon in Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi's *The Phenomenological Mind.*

Using a range of key sources from the phenomenological tradition, Gallagher and Zahavi argue that a radical distinction between mental states and behaviour is mistaken. They point out that we perceive both our own behaviour *and* the behaviour of others as a 'natural expression' of mental states.[83] According to Gallagher and Zahavi's view, mental states are constituted by both internal *and* external aspects. This is the Direct Social Perception approach to other minds and is summarised by Joel Krueger as follows: 'minds are *hybrid* entities: they consist of both internal (neural, physiological, and phenomenal)

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[82] Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science*. Routledge, 2008, pp.171-181.
[83] Ibid., p.185.

and external (behavioural, environmental) parts and processes'.[84] The external aspects are those that we can directly perceive embodied in a person's expressive behaviour. For example, we could say that we can *see* someone's happiness in their smile.

Nevertheless, those advocating the Direct Social Perception approach are not arguing that this perception gives us direct access to the *phenomenal* features of their first-person perspective. Rather, their claim is that we directly perceive the external aspects of another's mind, as embodied in their expressive behaviour. When it comes to the phenomenal features of the mind, we have direct experience of ours alone.[85] Overall, the debate regarding whether we experience the minds of others does not involve any particular focus on *phenomenal* consciousness. So although we must recognise that there is disagreement as to whether mental states can be directly perceived, it seems far less contentious to claim that the phenomenal consciousness involved in the experience of these mental states cannot be directly perceived.

Where the phenomenological tradition is most persuasive is in observing that our understanding of others is possible 'precisely because some of our mental states find a natural expression in bodily behaviour, and because the language we learn for our mental states is a language that we learnt to apply to others even as we learn to apply it to ourselves.'[86] Following this observation we can recognise that our own behaviours, which *can* be directly perceived by others, are intimately bound up with our own mental states and our own phenomenal

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[84] Joel Krueger, 'Direct Social Perception', *The Oxford Handbook of 4E Cognition,* Oxford University Press, 2018, p.306.

[85] It is worth noting that our direct knowledge of the phenomenal characteristics involved in our *own* mental states does not necessarily give us 'an immediate certainty' regarding their entire nature, nor are others left with nothing but 'insecure inference' regarding our mental states. As Gallagher and Zahavi point out, 'each type of access has its own strengths and weaknesses'. Another person may be in a position to tell us more about the sort of mental state we are in despite the fact that they have no access to the phenomenal characteristics arising within our consciousness. In this respect we may not have any kind of privileged access to our mental states, despite having privileged access to our own phenomenal consciousness..See Gallagher and Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind*, pp.185,186.

[86] Ibid., p.185.

consciousness. It is our own direct experience of this intimate mental-physical interweaving that maintains our confidence in our usual perception of others as phenomenally conscious. But this perception of others as phenomenally conscious is rooted in our development as social beings rather than in any direct observation of another's phenomenal consciousness.

Insofar as empirical evidence for the existence of phenomenal consciousness, whether brain-independent or brain-contingent, requires an objective method for detecting consciousness, we cannot be said to currently possess any objective empirical evidence for the existence of phenomenal consciousness. Here we begin to see the problem facing objective approaches to empirical evidence gathering when it comes to something fundamentally subjective like consciousness. As Tibetan Buddhist philosopher Thupten Jinpa points out, the range of empirical methods currently accepted within mainstream scientific enquiry provide no direct, perspective-independent access to consciousness itself.[87]

If we were to say that neuroscientists discover correlations between certain types of brain activity and certain conscious states, this would not be strictly accurate. Brain activity is not *really* correlated with conscious states, it is correlated with verbal reports and cognitive performances. There is no way to bypass these and go straight to consciousness itself, there is 'no access to consciousness that's independent of consciousness.'[88] For this reason, neuroscience does not offer direct access to, or the ability to detect, phenomenal consciousness itself. Rather, each neuroscientist is reflexively aware of their own phenomenal consciousness and takes it as given that the same phenomenon is an internal aspect of the minds of other people. But while we can use such verbal reports or cognitive acts as indicators of the presence of phenomenal consciousness, we cannot use their absence to justify the claim

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[87] Thompson, *Waking Dreaming Being*, p.97. This point has also been strongly made by (among others) David Chalmers and Raymond Tallis. See Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, p.115. See also Tallis, 'What Neuroscience Cannot Tell Us About Ourselves', pp.3-15, No.29, Fall, 2010.

[88] Thompson, *Waking Dreaming Being*, p.99.

that such consciousness has been annihilated. The assumption that living, talking, cognitively competent people are phenomenally conscious leaves open the question of whether this consciousness disappears when these indicators are absent.

While it is true that empirical evidence of brain-independent consciousness would require an objective method for detecting consciousness, the limits of empirical investigation when it comes to *any* form of consciousness might lead us to question whether *empirical* evidence is what we should be looking for. We only know that phenomenal consciousness exists because of reflexive self-awareness and the fact that we are phenomenally conscious cannot be demonstrated objectively. All we can do is hope that others will take our expressive behaviours as external aspects of our phenomenally conscious mind. But the perception that such behaviours are expressions of a phenomenally conscious mind is only ever directly verified in our own case. We never get direct access to both the external and internal aspects of another person's mind. This means that our everyday perception of others as phenomenally conscious is not based on particularly strong empirical evidence.

As covered in the previous chapter, it is *logically possible* that there is a world where living human beings verbally claim to be conscious and have cognitive capacities without being phenomenally conscious at all. As David Chalmers makes clear in his Zombie Argument, nothing about verbal utterances or cognitive capacities themselves makes it *necessarily true* that they are phenomenally conscious.[89] We take others to have *phenomenally conscious* minds because they are so much like us in every other way, but this confidence in our everyday perceptions is based on a single sample. Of course, we have no other example of phenomenal consciousness to work with. Nonetheless, what this demonstrates is that we do not have strong *empirical* grounds to support our perception of others as phenomenally conscious.

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[89] See Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind,* pp.93-171.

It is for these reasons that we should not expect objective methods alone to be adequate to the task of investigating claims that phenomenal consciousness can exist independently of the brain. With this in mind, to insist that the traditional Buddhist present objective evidence of brain-independent consciousness before such claims are taken seriously would be somewhat disingenuous. In order to engage with the question of what phenomenal consciousness is we must adopt certain methods that are not objective. Firstly, our only direct access to phenomenal consciousness is via our own subjectivity. Secondly, neuroscientific observations depend upon our assumption that phenomenal consciousness maps onto living humans in such a way that brain states can be correlated with conscious states. This is why, as Thompson points out, neuroscience cannot be said to provide 'overwhelming evidence that every conscious experience is identical to some pattern of brain activity.' Such an identity is, according to Thompson, a 'metaphysical interpretation of what neuroscience does show, namely, the contingency or dependence of certain kinds of mental events on certain kinds of neuronal events.'[90] Insofar as he believes that the dependence of mental events on neuronal events has been demonstrated, Thompson is ultimately unable to accept both Dharmakīrti and the Vajrayāna system's claims that consciousness can exist independently of the brain. For him they do not 'sit well with the scientific evidence'.[91]

But this is a problematic conclusion for Thompson to come to given that he acknowledges the difficulties facing attempts to gather scientific evidence for or against the existence of consciousness independent of the brain. In order to demonstrate the dependence of certain kinds of mental events on neuronal events, we would first need to establish that those mental events involve some objectively measurable features. For example, we might define a mental state such as anger as being *partly constituted* by certain embodied reactions such as the tensing of muscles, furrowing of the brow and so on. In this case the

[90] Thompson, *Waking Dreaming Being,* 2015, p.101.
[91] Ibid., p.105.

arising of anger, so defined, could be said to be dependent upon those neuronal events that make such embodied reactions possible.

Nevertheless, while we might be able to demonstrate that the embodied aspect of mental events such as anger is dependent on certain neuronal events, an objective demonstration may not be possible in the case of what we might call "phenomenal anger", the phenomenal characteristics of anger, or 'what it feels like' to be angry. It could be demonstrated in an objective manner that the embodied reactions that partly constitute anger cannot arise without the basic neuronal components necessary to make these bodily reactions mechanically possible. But we would have trouble demonstrating that "phenomenal anger" *cannot* arise without these embodied behaviours. We could use verbal reports to suggest that "phenomenal anger" *does not* arise in the absence of certain behaviours or neuronal events but this would not demonstrate that this phenomenal aspect is *dependent* upon those behaviours or neuronal events. There could be a relationship aside from dependence that explains their co-arising.

Given that there is no objective means to detect the phenomenal characteristics that only arise within consciousness, the subjective features of mental events such as anger cannot be detected let alone shown to be incapable of arising when certain neuronal events or behaviours associated with anger are absent. Where there is no means to identify phenomenal consciousness itself with something objectively detectable, no amount of correlation will demonstrate dependence. Just because event Y arises at the same time as event X, it does not prove that event Y is dependent on event X. Causal relationships like dependence are easily assumed but notoriously hard to prove.[92]

Given this situation it is difficult to see how Buddhist accounts according to which consciousness can exist independently of the brain could fail to fit with the scientific evidence. Some form of interaction between consciousness and

[92] Arnold, *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing*, p.46.

the physical is always assumed in such accounts. All they need to do is explain how manipulation of the brain can be accompanied by reports of changes to, and perhaps even the absence of, certain kinds of conscious states. In this way, we can see that even Thompson's claim about what the neuroscientific evidence shows is interpreted through certain assumptions about what demonstrates dependence.

Whether via the assumption that verbal reports of consciousness have their origins in phenomenal consciousness or the assumption that certain conscious states arise in dependence upon certain brain states, neuroscience-based claims about consciousness are based on working assumptions. These assumptions are not rooted in empirical evidence in the normal sense because it is not clear how the key pieces of objective evidence could be gathered to support or overturn them. They are closer to being metaphysical assumptions about the relationship between the subjective and objective aspects of reality. The working assumption of neuroscience, that having a functioning brain means that all experiences are contingent upon its functioning, can only be supported or undermined using an objective method of detecting phenomenal consciousness. That this method does not currently exist means that, for now, once the working assumption of neuroscience has been presupposed, it cannot be overturned.

This is a little unfair on those interlocutors, Buddhist or otherwise, who are invited to join the research programme seeking to understand consciousness but who are barred from challenging a neuroscientific orthodoxy that precludes their own claims from being taken seriously. Buddhist interlocutors in debates about the origins of consciousness are justified in asking why the burden of proof is on those who *do not* consider consciousness to depend upon the brain for its existence. They can ask this question given the following: (1) Given that current neuroscientific methods have no *access* to phenomenal consciousness itself, (2) Given that there has yet to be a satisfactory account of *what,* in the physical world, phenomenal consciousness actually is, and (3) Given that there is yet to be a satisfactory explanation of *how* phenomenal consciousness arises with a functioning brain in the first place. Given these factors, an interlocutor

can legitimately question whether there is an adequate basis for assuming, from the outset, *that* consciousness arises only with a functioning brain.

In asking whether consciousness depends upon the brain we are engaging with two sets of phenomena, brain states and phenomenal consciousness. The two have not been observed together. Phenomenal consciousness is observed "from within" by reflexive self-awareness, brain states are observed objectively through the senses and through investigative technologies. At no point has one of these phenomena revealed an existential dependence on the other. Such dependence is a metaphysical assumption that should be defended using philosophical arguments. It is also an assumption that can be challenged by philosophical arguments. Buddhist philosophical arguments for the existence of brain-independent consciousness challenge the idea that phenomenal consciousness could depend for its existence on physical states. These are not empirical observations of a brain-independent consciousness; they are reasons to suggest that consciousness is, by its very nature, independent of the physical body and brain.

If we attempt to avoid any metaphysical or philosophical arguments about the nature of reality and simply approach the question of whether consciousness can exist without the brain using observations alone we will encounter myriad problems. The lack of an objective method for detecting consciousness has already been addressed, but what about subjective or meditative investigations?

Thompson, referencing the Dalai Lama, justifies his preference for the Vajrayāna system of investigation on the grounds that it has been devised through 'the most comprehensive means of investigation', which means it places emphasis on the observation of meditators as well as on the philosophical arguments of earlier schools.[93] In Thompson's case, the Vajrayāna system is seen as superior to other Buddhist systems because it

[93] Thompson, *Waking Dreaming Being*, p.84.

uses inner observation techniques that can be compared with scientific methods.

But meditative observations cannot be appealed to *in lieu* of metaphysical arguments about the relationship between the subjective reality of consciousness and the objective reality beyond. Firstly, until we can directly access the conscious experience of adept meditators, any appeal to their claims will be on the grounds that we have taken them to be authoritative. An additional justification is required for taking the adept meditator's claims about exotic experiences, which are unfamiliar to us, to be accurate or genuine. Secondly, even if we take meditative observations to be authoritative in shedding light on some of the fundamental characteristics of consciousness, we cannot assume that they can be used to make claims about its relationship to the world beyond. As Thompson points out, subjective experiences cannot tell us anything about whether or not there are objective, physical factors producing conscious experiences. This is because 'the phenomenal character of an experience isn't "transparent" with regard to its physical embodiment'.[94] This undermines claims made from meditative experiences about consciousness transcending the body.

Overall, there are limits to the role that meditative observations can play in defending claims about the possibility of consciousness surviving the death of the body. Avoiding metaphysical arguments is not a viable option for those Buddhists who wish to present a case for their traditional approach to consciousness. Such arguments will need to be made if traditional Buddhists are unwilling to accept the widespread metaphysical assumption that consciousness arises from, or is reducible to, brain activity. These necessary philosophical arguments about the relationship between the subjective character of consciousness and the objective world beyond it will be the concern of the following chapters.

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[94] Ibid., p.94.

4.7 Conclusion

Hopefully this chapter has gone some of the way in exploring how consciousness is understood within traditional Buddhist philosophy, with particular regard to Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth. We have seen that Dharmakīrti's argument relies on two key premises: Firstly, consciousness is distinct from other non-conscious phenomena, particularly physical phenomena. Secondly, consciousness must have a substantial cause and this substantial cause must have the same intrinsic nature as the effect, namely consciousness. From here we explored Thompson's attempt to find an alternative to Dharmakīrti's dualism in the Vajrayāna system of Tantric Tibetan Buddhism. According to this system, consciousness is inseparable from subtle physical energies. This does not, however, distinguish the Vajrayāna approach to consciousness from Dharmakīrti's. Both are influenced by early Abhidharma systems such as the Sarvāstivāda, in which consciousness is considered to be a fundamentally distinct and irreducible phenomenon. At the same time, the Abhidharma systems understood that consciousness was inseparable from other factors and connected, through them, to the rest of reality. With reference to the Chariot and Cluster principles adhered to by Abhidharma philosophers, we explored some of the reasons for taking phenomenal consciousness to be both something that we cannot analyse into separable factors and also something that is intrinsically connected to the rest of reality.

Through this exploration it has become clear that, within Buddhist philosophy, consciousness is a fundamental means of acquiring knowledge. In particular, direct conscious experience is the only way to come to know the intrinsic nature of the fundamental features of reality. The limitation here is that consciousness may not be able to know the intrinsic nature of objects that lie beyond consciousness. This limitation is mirrored by the fact that the empirical methods of objective observation used in the sciences cannot gain direct access to consciousness. This is because any given consciousness is only known reflexively, by its own intrinsic self-awareness. While consciousness and the intrinsic natures that appear to it can only be known by consciousness, the

empirical sciences that provide information about our physical world and neurophysiology cannot access consciousness.

In the next chapter we will begin to see that our understanding of the nature of the physical is so limited that we cannot even be sure that there are *any* factors that are *completely* devoid of consciousness. By exploring this possibility, we will be able to support Dharmakīrti's claim that an instance of consciousness must arise from a previous instance of consciousness. However, we will also see that panpsychism, the view that consciousness is ubiquitous, could undermine the first premise of Dharmakīrti's argument: that consciousness is distinct from physical factors.

5. Arguments against the Brute Emergence of Consciousness

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we explored some of the reasons why both empirical observations of the brain and meditative observations of conscious experience provide insufficient evidence to make claims about the relationship between the subjective reality of consciousness and the material reality of the brain. In particular, neither method is able to muster the full range of evidence needed to make a claim about whether the existence of consciousness depends on a functioning brain. In order to rule out the existence of consciousness without a functioning brain, we would need to have an objective method for detecting the existence of consciousness. But because this does not currently exist, neuroscientific observations cannot tell us whether a lack of brain activity correlates to a complete absence of consciousness. It is only through reflexive self-awareness that any of us are able to observe and recognise the presence of phenomenal consciousness. But reflexive self-observation is not an objective method because the subject's particular experiences cannot be accessed by others.

Furthermore, the reflexive observations that reveal the characteristics of conscious experience may not be enough to make reliable claims about the capacity for consciousness to exist without a functioning brain. In *Waking Dreaming Being,* Evan Thompson argues that, when it comes to those claims about consciousness transcending the body that are made from special experiences, 'the phenomenal character of an experience isn't "transparent" with regard to its physical embodiment'.[1] As far as Thompson is concerned, subjective experiences cannot tell us anything about whether or not there are

[1] Evan Thompson, *Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy*, Columbia University Press, 2015, p.94.

objective, physical factors producing those experiences. This point has serious repercussions for Buddhist arguments for rebirth.

The previous chapter explained how Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth relies on two key premises: Firstly, consciousness is distinct from other phenomena, particularly physical phenomena. Secondly, consciousness must have a homogeneous cause and this homogeneous cause must have the same distinct character as the effect, namely consciousness. While Thompson broadly agrees with Dharmakīrti's characterisation of consciousness, he thinks that the Buddhist philosopher is too quick to characterise the physical as being distinct from it. It is for this reason that he challenges the first premise of Dharmakīrti's argument. If experience is not transparent, we cannot simply "look through" experience at the physical world. This inability to directly access the nature of the physical precludes our ability to claim that it is completely devoid of the phenomenal characteristics that make consciousness so distinctive. We cannot justify the claim that physical matter and consciousness have completely different characteristics on the basis that 'consciousness as experienced from the inside through mental awareness seems different from matter as experienced from the outside through the senses.'[2]

In this way, Thompson's rejection of the first premise of Dharmakīrti's argument involves embracing the second. Thompson accepts Dharmakīrti's claim that physical factors alone cannot produce consciousness *if the physical is devoid of mental or phenomenal characteristics.* But the reason Thompson accepts Dharmakīrti's second premise is not because of neuroscientific evidence, nor because of meditative observations. He does so because of the *metaphysical* reasons for rejecting the view that consciousness can arise from physical processes that are completely devoid of any of the distinctive characteristics of consciousness. Where neuroscientific and meditative observations can go no

[2] Ibid., p.94.

further, metaphysical argumentation can work to undermine the view that consciousness could arise from completely unconscious factors.

Nevertheless, in contemporary philosophy of mind, this metaphysical argumentation has been used primarily to support panpsychism, the view that consciousness is an aspect of physical reality. The panpsychist denies that the physical processes of the body and brain are devoid of consciousness by defending what is essentially the second premise of Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth. According to panpsychism, consciousness cannot emerge from intrinsically unconscious phenomena but it *can* arise from purely physical factors *as long as these factors are intrinsically conscious*. Panpsychism of one sort or another has been defended by a number of philosophers and is attracting increasing attention within the philosophy of consciousness.[3] One contemporary philosopher whose arguments have been quite influential is Galen Strawson. In *Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism,* Strawson argues that a realistic physicalist must accept that consciousness is real and that it is physical. But, as Strawson argues, it is only reasonable to consider consciousness to be physical if physical reality includes consciousness within its fundamental nature.[4]

Insofar as Strawson's argument is persuasive, it provides support to the second premise of Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth. Strawson masterfully and potently defends a number of premises that are needed before an argument for rebirth can get off the ground. It is fortunate for our purposes that Strawson

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[3] Gottfried Leibniz and Baruch Spinoza are two famous examples of philosophers who espoused panpsychist metaphysical theories. See Philip Goff, William Seager, and Sean Allen-Hermanson, 'Panpsychism', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2017 Edition, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), 2017.

[4] Given that Strawson argues for consciousness being fundamental to reality, we might wonder why he maintains that his position is a form of physicalism. The answer is that Strawson defines "the physical" to be that which is concretely real and spatiotemporally located. Insofar as he maintains that everything in reality is part of the kind of space-time continuum postulated within physics, Strawson is a physicalist. If this space-time continuum is also pervaded by consciousness it does not, for Strawson, stop ours being a fundamentally physical reality. See Galen Strawson, 'Physicalist Panpsychism', in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness,* S. Schneider, and M. Velmans (eds.), Wiley, 2017.

adheres closely to what has thus far been referred to as the Chariot Principle, the Buddhist approach to reality in which any complex phenomenon is understood as a configuration of particular characteristics that make it what it is. Insofar as it can be smoothly reduced to these characteristics, the complex phenomenon cannot be said to ultimately exist. Strawson also provides good reasons to adopt what I have referred to as the Continuity Principle, the Abhidharma principle according to which no characteristic arises without precedent. Although a traditional Buddhist will need to challenge panpsychism in order to defend rebirth, they can also benefit from how effectively the panpsychist can absorb and transform physicalism into an account of the world where consciousness is a fundamental feature of reality. This is why, in this chapter, we will spend some time exploring the key points of Strawson's argument for panpsychism.

5.2 Arguments against Physicsalism

Galen Strawson begins his argument for Panpsychism by establishing that the genuine, concrete existence of consciousness or experience cannot be questioned by a realistic physicalist:

> You're certainly not a realistic physicalist, you're not a real physicalist, if you deny the existence of the phenomenon whose existence is more certain than the existence of anything else: experience, 'consciousness', conscious experience, 'phenomenology', experiential 'what-it's-likeness', feeling, sensation, explicit conscious thought as we have it and know it at almost every waking moment.[5]

In this way, Strawson points to the undeniable fact of our being conscious as the bedrock for any realistic approach to reality. Like the Abhidharma Buddhist philosopher, Strawson takes conscious experience to be the only means by

[5] Galen Strawson, 'Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism', in *Real Materialism and other essays,* Oxford University Press, 2008, p.53.

which we are directly acquainted with reality.[6] To deny the existence of phenomenal experiences or appearances is to lose any foothold in reality.

Strawson goes on to make a distinction between this view, which he calls real physicalism, and '*physic**s**alism'*. According to *physic**s**alism,* 'the nature or essence of all concrete reality can in principle be fully captured in the terms of *physics'.*[7] Physics tells us how the physical is structured, how physical events unfold and what kinds of laws determine the course of these events but it does not reveal the qualities, essences or natures that make physical reality *what it is*. The phenomenal qualities found in conscious experience are aspects or features of what reality is. Insofar as physical terminology does not deal with these sorts of qualities, the nature of experience cannot be captured in terms of physics: 'Physics is one thing, the physical is another.'[8]

While physics tells us a great deal about the physical, this does not mean that it offers an exhaustive understanding of *what the physical is.* Specifically, the essential nature of physical reality is left untouched by the mathematical and structural approach of physics. Here we can interpret Strawson's approach through an Abhidharma lens and say that physics does not have any access to physical *dharmas* because the intrinsic nature of a *dharma* can only be known through the direct conscious experience of it. In the essay *Real Materialism,* Strawson presents this point as follows:

> No sensible person thinks that physics has nailed all the essential properties of the physical. Current physics is profoundly beautiful and useful, but it is in a state of chronic internal tension. It may be added, with Russell and others, that although physics appears to tell us a great deal about certain of the general structural or mathematical characteristics of the physical, it fails to give us any further insight into the nature of whatever it is that has these structural or mathematical characteristics.[9]

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[6] Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, Hackett Publishing, 2007, p.113.
[7] Strawson, 'Realistic Monism', p.54.
[8] Galen Strawson, 'Real Materialism', in *Real Materialism and other essays,* Oxford University Press, 2008, p.20.
[9] Ibid.

Here Strawson is echoing Bertrand Russell's earlier recognition that physics cannot offer a complete picture of reality as long as it offers nothing aside from bare mathematical and causal structure. In *The Analysis of Matter* Russell makes the following brilliant point:

> There are many possible ways of turning some things hitherto regarded as "real" into mere laws concerning the other things. Obviously there must be a limit to this process, or else all the things in the world will merely be each other's washing.[10]

Concrete reality must involve real "stuff": qualities, characteristics, or properties that have a nature, that are *something in particular.* If we reduce every real thing to its causal power or disposition to produce effects in other things we are left with only a bare structure with nothing grounding this structure in reality. Not only is this a fundamental principle of the Abhidharma, it is also a point that has been recently developed by a number of philosophers, among them Derek Pereboom and Howard Robinson. Pereboom points out that there is an intuitive reason for finding fault with a purely dispositional account of reality:

> Fragility and flammability are clear examples of dispositional properties; shape and size are often cited as paradigmatic categorical properties. Many find it intuitive that categorical properties are required to account for dispositional properties. For instance, a ball's disposition to roll requires an explanation, and it is provided by its categorical properties of spherical shape and rigidity.[11]

The intuition is that without concrete categorical properties like shape and size, a purely dispositional account of reality would fail to explain why dispositional properties are the way they are. But the problem goes deeper than this. Without categorical properties, dispositional properties lack the grounding to render them coherent. As Robinson points out: 'A power is a power to produce some effect, but if everything is a power, it is the power to produce another power'.[12]

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[10] Bertrand Russell, *The Analysis of Matter,* London, Kegan Paul, 1927, p.325.

[11] Derek Pereboom, 'Consciousness, Physicalism, and Absolutely Intrinsic Properties', *Consciousness in the Physical World,* Torin Alter and Yujin Nagasawa (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2015, p.301.

[12] Howard Robinson, 'Idealism', *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind,* Brian McLaughlin, Ansgar Beckermann, and Sven Walter (eds.), Oxford University Press,

If every property is nothing over and above its tendency to produce effects in other things there will be no categorical property that grounds these powers; all things will, in Russell's words, 'be each other's washing'.

Fragility, the tendency to break, is an empty property without the possibility of breakage, which requires that there is some concrete stuff which could break. Flammability, the tendency to burn, is nothing without the possibility of fire, with all its properties. Rolling requires that there is something that rolls and a surface to roll on, with all the properties involved therein. These dispositional properties depend on further properties in order to exist as anything more than incoherently impotent tendencies. If those further properties are also dispositional then they will, in turn, depend on yet further properties in order to be more than impotent tendencies. But if there are *only* dispositional properties then reality is nothing but pure tendencies to produce other pure tendencies to produce other pure tendencies and so on *ad infinitum*. At no point would there be any grounding properties to make the effects of these tendencies into actual realities.

If flammability, for example, is an empty disposition until fire arises, flammability is practically meaningless until fire occurs as a concrete phenomenon. But if fire is nothing but a complex system of tendencies to produce certain effects, it remains an empty disposition, as does flammability, until those effects arise. If those effects are further tendencies to produce certain effects, fire and flammability remain practically meaningless until those further tendencies produce their effects. But in a world of pure dispositions this would never happen and reality would be nothing but empty tendencies that never produce any actual effects.

A world of pure powers collapses without a basis in non-dispositional, categorical properties.[13] This is why Russell proposed a position in which the

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2009, p.192. See also Simon Blackburn 'Filling In Space', *Analysis,* Vol. 50, No. 2, March 1990, pp.62-65.

[13] When it comes to Abhidharma Buddhist philosophy *dharmas* seem to be the basic categorical properties in virtue of which all merely dispositional properties have their

categorical features of physical reality ground its dispositional features. This position has come to be known as Russellian Monism and one of its notable features is that it takes the categorical properties of physical reality to be the basis for explaining how consciousness arises from purely physical nature. The Russellian Monist, unlike the *physic**s**alist,* recognises that physics cannot provide a complete understanding of reality because its exclusively dispositional account leaves out the categorical properties needed to ground dispositions in actuality, categorical properties such as those revealed by consciousness. As Pereboom has summarised:

> The most basic properties contemporary physics reveals are all dispositional, and thus it leaves us ignorant of the categorical properties needed to explain them. An electron's negative charge is one of those basic physical properties, and it is a disposition to repel other particles with negative charge and to attract particles with positive charge. This dispositional property must have a categorical basis, and it, the Russellian Monist hypothesizes, is the sort of feature that can also account for our consciousness. Russellian Monists have proposed a range of such more fundamental but yet undiscovered properties – from conscious properties of, for instance, microphysical particles, to properties similar enough to paradigmatic physical properties to qualify as physical themselves, to properties unlike any we've ever encountered, but capable of explaining consciousness.[14]

From this summary of Russellian Monism we can see that panpsychism is a single species within the broader category of Russellian Monist positions.[15] What all Russellian Monists have in common is a recognition that we do not know what the intrinsic nature of the physical is because we do not know all of

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grounding. In particular, the qualitative dharmas that constitute colours, shape, feelings, and so on are clearly taken to be categorical properties, not simply dispositions to produce other properties. See Y. Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma: Its Inquiry Into the Nature of Conditioned Reality*, Centre for Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong, 2010, pp.15-19, 206-208. See also Bhikkhu K. L. Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma,* Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong, 2007, pp.261, 262.

[14] Pereboom, 'Consciousness, Physicalism, and Absolutely Intrinsic Properties', p.301.

[15] For more on different approaches to Russellian Monism see Torin Alter and Yujin Nagasawa (eds.)*, Consciousness in the Physical World,* Oxford University Press, 2015. See also Philip Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality*, Oxford University Press, 2017.

its categorical properties. The only properties of this sort that we can access directly are the phenomenal properties found in conscious experience. This is why conscious experience is where all our investigations into the nature of reality must begin. This situation is also recognised by Thompson in *Waking Dreaming Being*. Accepting that we cannot 'step outside of consciousness' to see the nature of the world beyond, Thompson also accepts that this fact gives conscious experience 'a kind of irreducible primacy.'[16] It is from our conscious experiences that we create models based on consensus regarding the features of our experience, which we then model in terms of 'certain abstract and invariant structural features of how the world appears to us at various spatio-temporal scales of observation'.[17]

The phenomenal qualities found in experience are the only examples that we have of the nature of reality itself. The phenomenal character of a red rose is a distinct aspect of reality in that it is defined by nothing other than what it is like as an experience. Once again we can recognise the relevance of Abhidharma principles; the definitive characteristics or *dharmas* that make a phenomenon such as a colour what it is can only be known through direct experience of them. No description of the redness of a rose would be sufficient for someone without any experience of colour to understand it. As we saw in the previous chapter (section 4.4), this was the point made in Frank Jackson's famous essay in which he introduces Mary, the colour scientist raised in a black and white environment. Jackson asks his audience whether Mary learns a new fact. If she newly learns that there is a particular phenomenal character of red, this must be a fact unknown to physics.[18]

This argument is often presented as if it demonstrates that there is something very special happening in the human (and non-human animal) brain that physics does not currently have the means to understand. From purely non-

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[16] Thompson, *Waking Dreaming Being*, p.100.
[17] Ibid., p.101.
[18] Frank Jackson, 'Epiphenomenal Qualia', *Philosophical Quarterly,* Vol. 32, April, 1982, pp.127-136.

experiential processes, wondrous phenomenal qualities arise. But as Robinson has pointed out, Jackson's argument shows that 'standard physicalism cannot capture any conception of the physical that goes beyond the purely abstract or mathematically expressed.'[19] According to Robinson, Mary cannot learn about the phenomenal qualities of colour despite knowing everything that physics knows about colour because physics does not deal with the sorts of qualities and categorical properties that colour experiences truly are. Standard Physicalism, what Strawson calls *physic**s**alism,* takes physics to be involved in a far more exhaustive exploration of reality than it actually is.

When we imagine Mary the colour scientist in her black and white room, learning the physical facts about people looking at roses, we can recognise that she is missing a salient fact about the world. We are able to do this because we can recognise the difference between the physical facts about the colour red and the fact of its distinctive phenomenal character. What we might fail to recognise is that there are physical phenomena aside from colours, sounds and so on about which we have gathered many physical facts whilst completely missing out on the distinctive characteristics that make these phenomena what they are.

At this point we could remain agnostic about the nature of the physical, simply accepting that its fundamental nature is not disclosed by physics. But Strawson wishes to claim that in order to be a real physicalist, one must accept that the physical is experiential. He uses the words of physicist Arthur Eddington in order to motivate his case:

> 'Our knowledge of the nature of the objects treated in physics consists solely of readings of pointers [on instrumental dials] and other indicators'. This being so, he asks, 'what knowledge have we of the nature of atoms that renders it at all incongruous that they should constitute a thinking object?' Absolutely none, he rightly

[19] Howard Robinson, *From the Knowledge Argument to Mental Substance*, Cambridge University Press, 2016, p.134.

> replies: 'science has nothing to say as to the intrinsic nature of the atom'.[20]

Eddington points out that the atom, according to what physics knows, is:

> a schedule of pointer readings [on instrument dials]. The schedule is, we agree, attached to some unknown background. Why not then attach it to something of a spiritual [i.e. mental] nature of which a prominent characteristic is *thought* [=experience, consciousness]. It seems rather *silly* to prefer to attach it to something of a so-called 'concrete' nature inconsistent with thought, and then to wonder where the thought comes from.[21]

Both Eddington and Strawson push the physicalist to accept that, if conscious experience arises from the physical *and* we do not know the nature of the physical, why not assume that the nature of the physical is the same as that of conscious experience. This is how Strawson pushes the physicalist towards a panpsychist view, defined in *Realistic Monism* as 'the view that the existence of every real concrete thing involves experiential being, even if it also involves non-experiential being.'[22] Panpsychists of all stripes are committed to the view that whatever the fundamental level of reality is, it will involve the experiential, phenomenal character that makes consciousness so distinctive.

5.3 Strawson's Argument against the Brute Emergence of Consciousness

Consciousness, for the panpsychist, does not arise from something devoid of any experiential character. On this point the panpsychist philosopher is aligned with Buddhist philosophers like Dharmakīrti. Both reject the possibility that conscious experience arises or originates solely from non-conscious, non-experiential factors. The arising or emergence of experience from the non-experiential is not like other forms of emergence. As an example of a normal

[20] Strawson, 'Realistic Monism', p.59.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., p.57.

form of emergence, Strawson looks at two cases. The first is the case of liquidity emerging from water molecules:

> Liquidity is often proposed as a translucent example of an emergent phenomenon, and the facts seem straightforward. Liquidity is not a characteristic of individual H2O molecules. Nor is it a characteristic of the ultimates of which H2O molecules are composed. And yet when you put many H2O molecules together they constitute a liquid (at certain temperatures, at least), they constitute something liquid. So liquidity is a truly emergent property of certain groups of H2O molecules. It is not there at the bottom of things, and then it is there.[23]

The second example is the case of Bénard convection cells:

> When heat is applied evenly to the bottom of a tray filled with a thin sheet of viscous oil, it transforms the smooth surface of the oil into an array of hexagonal cells of moving fluid called Bénard convection cells.[24]

Strawson points out that we 'can easily make intuitive sense of the idea that certain sorts of molecules are so constituted that they don't bind together in a tight lattice but slide past or off each other (in accordance with van de Waals molecular interaction laws) in a way that gives rise to – is – the phenomenon of liquidity.'[25] It is just as easy, in the case of Bénard convection cells, to understand that 'physical laws relating to surface tension, viscosity, and other forces governing the motion of molecules give rise to hexagonal patterns on the surface of a fluid-like oil when it is heated.'[26] In both of these cases we are coming to understand emergence through a relatively small set of 'conceptually homogeneous shape-size-mass-charge-number-position-motion-involving physics notions'.[27] This form of emergence is not strange because the physics notions remain of the same type as we move from the molecules to their liquid constitution or hexagonal pattern.

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[23] Ibid., p.61.
[24] Ibid., p.61.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

Furthermore, in these cases we can also understand how emergent phenomena are reducible to other phenomena. Liquidity, for example, can 'reduce without remainder to shape-size-mass-charge-etc. phenomena.'[28] A little work is required to 'suppress our initial tendency to confuse liquidity as it appears to sensory experience' with the physical description of liquidity. But once we have bracketed out our experiential notions about liquidity and all that remains is an understanding of liquidity according to 'shape-size-mass-charge-number-position-motion-involving physics notions', we can see how liquidity smoothly emerges from and is reducible to molecular interactions.[29] The same is true with Bénard convection cells.

Nevertheless, the ease with which emergence and reduction can be understood in these cases follows from the nature of the constituents from which liquidity and convection cells are emerging. In order for this easily understandable form of emergence and reduction to be possible 'there must be something about the nature of the emerged-from (and nothing else) in virtue of which the emerger emerges as it does and is what it is.'[30] In other words, it is the nature of the constituents that makes the emergent properties what they are and this fact can be understood when we investigate what is happening in cases of emergence. Investigating liquids and convection cells, we find molecules that interact in ways that make emergent phenomena completely intelligible.

But in order to take liquidity and convection cells to be analogous to the emergence of the experiential from the non-experiential 'it would have to be just as plain how you get experiential phenomena from wholly non-experiential phenomena.'[31] The problem Strawson highlights is that when trying to find an analogy for how experience emerges 'we can't make do with things like liquidity, where we move wholly within a completely conceptually homogeneous (non-heterogeneous) set of notions.'[32] The jump from the structural, non-experiential

[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., pp.61-2.
[30] Ibid., p.63.
[31] Ibid., p.63.
[32] Ibid., p.63.

notions of physics to the rich, phenomenal, experiential notions presented to us in appearance makes any emergence in this case completely different from the cases of liquidity and convection cells.

Nevertheless, Strawson is able to devise a suitable analogy for the emergence of experience from the non-experiential:

> Suppose someone proposes that there are real, concrete, intrinsically, irreducibly and wholly *non-spatial* phenomena, and that when they stand in certain wholly non-spatial relations they give rise to or constitute real, concrete, intrinsically and irreducibly spatial phenomena.[33]

This analogy works because the emergence of spatial from non-spatial phenomena requires a qualitative leap similar to the leap from the non-experiential to the experiential. If phenomena existing in a context devoid of position, direction, or extension can give rise to spatial phenomena that are located and extended in spatial directions, this would be analogous to the emergence of conscious experience.

But Strawson does not think that the emergence of the spatial from the non-spatial makes any sense and it is easy to agree with him. Spatial characteristics such as extension, direction, position and so on do not seem to admit of reduction to anything lacking in similarly spatial characteristics. It simply does not seem plausible that non-spatial phenomena would be able to provide spatial phenomena with their distinctive spatial characteristics. The only way in which space could emerge from non-spatial relations is if spatial phenomena are mere appearances and so not really spatial at all. In this case, the emergence of the spatial from the non-spatial would no longer work as an analogy to the emergence of experience. Unlike an illusory space, which is not really spatial, an illusory experience is just as real as any other experience.

If the emergence of the experiential from the non-experiential *is* analogous to that of the spatial from the non-spatial, this would go to show that neither space

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[33] Ibid., p.64.

nor experience can emerge solely from phenomena devoid of their distinctive characteristics. Neither type of phenomena can emerge if their defining features cannot be traced back to the factors from which they emerge in such a way that those factors determine precisely why the emergent phenomena are the types of phenomena that they are. As Strawson puts it:

> If it really is true that Y is emergent from X then it must be the case that Y is in some sense wholly dependent on X and X alone, so that all features of Y trace intelligibly back to X (where 'intelligible' is a metaphysical rather than an epistemic notion). *Emergence can't be brute.* It is built into the heart of the notion of emergence that emergence cannot be brute in the sense of there being absolutely no reason in the nature of things why the emerging thing is as it is.[34]

One of Strawson's main claims here is that the intelligibility with which the features of an emergent phenomenon can be traced back to the phenomenon from which it emerged is a metaphysical rather than epistemic notion. To say that emergent features can be traced intelligibly back to the emerged-from phenomenon is to say that the emergent features are the way they are because of the way that the emerged-from phenomenon is. To say this is to say that it is in the nature of the emerged-from phenomenon for it to give rise to certain emergent features. As Strawson explains:

> For any feature Y of anything that is correctly considered to be emergent from X, there must be something about X and X alone in virtue of which Y emerges, and which is sufficient for Y.[35]

The nature of X, the emerged-from phenomenon, is at the heart of what emergence is because every feature of the emergent phenomenon must, by definition, emerge from X. 'For Y truly to *emerge* from X is for Y to arise from or out of X or be given in or with Y *given how X is.*'[36] Insofar as it is within the nature of X to give rise to Y, it is possible for us to recognise that Y is given in X. This is what makes the tracing of a feature back to an emerged-from phenomenon intelligible. But this intelligibility is not a matter of whether or not

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[34] Ibid, p.65.
[35] Ibid, p.65.
[36] Ibid., p.66.

we *do* recognise that Y is given in or follows from X. Rather, the intelligibility is in the things themselves. Intelligibility is the state of affairs in which the nature of X determines, by its very nature, what Y is. Given an intelligible state of affairs, knowledge and understanding of the nature of X involves knowledge that the feature Y can arise from it. An intelligible state of affairs is due to the nature of the emerged-from basis and its intimate relationship with emergent features; it is not primarily a matter of our epistemic capacities.

For example, in the case of liquidity its fluid structure follows from the nature of H2O molecules at a certain temperature. If H2O molecules vibrating with a certain amount of heat energy are X and the feature liquidity is Y, we can see that Y is given in the way that these molecules are. It is the nature of the H2O molecules vibrating as they do at certain temperatures that brings liquidity with it. The liquidity of water is given in a proper understanding of H2O just as the nature of H2O is given in a full understanding of the particular liquidity of water. The intelligibility with which we can trace the way liquidity is back to its molecular dynamic is not primarily a matter of our epistemic capacities. Our epistemic capacities could be optimal but would still fail to trace the nature of liquidity back to the nature of its emerged-from basis if the nature of liquidity was nothing to do with the nature of H2O molecules. This is why such intelligibility is a metaphysical rather than epistemic notion.

If there were features of the emergent phenomenon that were not given in, or did not follow from, the nature of the emerged-from phenomenon, the relationship between the two would be unintelligible. And an unintelligible relationship between the emerger and the emerged-from renders the process of emergence in such a case unintelligible. This in turn brings highly problematic consequences to our attempts at making sense of reality, as Strawson illustrates:

> Y must arise out of or be given in X in some essentially non-arbitrary and indeed wholly non-arbitrary way. X has to have something – indeed everything – to do with it. That's what emerging is (that's how liquidity arises out of non-liquid phenomena). It is essentially an in-virtue-of relation. It cannot be brute. Otherwise it will be intelligible to suppose that existence can emerge from (come out of, develop out

> of) non-existence, or even that concrete phenomena can emerge from wholly abstract phenomena. Brutality rules out nothing.[37]

Insofar as we entertain the possibility of brute emergence, we are entertaining the possibility that there are phenomena that come into being with features and properties that have nothing to do with the nature of the phenomena from which they emerge, aside from the brute fact that the former emerge from the latter. In each case the relationship between the emergent features and the emerged-from phenomenon will be arbitrary. In the time before the emergent phenomenon arose there will not have been anything about the nature of existing phenomena from which it followed that the particular features of the eventual emergent phenomenon would arise. That such features then go on to arise would be an unprecedented brute fact, an inexplicable event that would not follow from the nature of events that went before. And, as Strawson makes clear, taking such brute events to be a genuine possibility leaves nothing ruled out. Once we have accepted brute emergence into our metaphysics, there is no claim that is too bizarre to be plausible because every possible phenomenon could emerge from any other phenomenon at any time.

The problems facing the notion of brute emergence are very much like those facing the notion of an uncaused event. If we were to accept that some events occur without being caused, we would be accepting the possibility that, at any time, any number of events of any possible type could occur without prior causes or conditions. In such a world, prediction, understanding, and therefore intelligibility would be impossible.[38] A theory built on such a foundation could not develop beyond this foundation without first admitting that its every supposition was as good a guess as even the most outlandish conjecture.

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[37] Ibid., p.66.

[38] Ruling out the possibility of uncaused events has long been a precondition for an intelligible account of reality. We find it as a fundamental principle in both early Buddhist philosophy and in Kant's attempts to formulate a basic framework for knowledge. See Y. Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma: Its Inquiry Into the Nature of Conditioned Reality*, Centre for Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong, 2010, p.45, See also Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. Norman Kemp Smith, Basingstoke, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2007, p.248.

A theory that accepts brute emergence fairs no better. To claim that a phenomenon has "brutally emerged" is not to claim that it arose without cause but it is to claim that the features of the brutally emergent phenomenon are without precedent. In such a case, the fact that particular features emerged is simply a brute fact; there is nothing about the emerged-from phenomenon that prefigures the arising of those features. So while we can claim that a brutally emergent phenomenon has causes, these causes are *brute causes.* Brute causation is like brute emergence in that its occurrence would amount to a reality in which one set of phenomena give rise to a particular phenomenon without there being anything about the nature of the causal phenomena that gives us the features of the newly arising phenomenon. The relationship between the causes and the effect would be strictly arbitrary. If phenomena A and B are brute causes of phenomenon C, nobody, not even an epistemically optimal agent, would be able to discern that A and B cause C if they didn't simply know *that* A and B cause C.

The only difference between an event arising without cause and an event arising from brute causation is that in the latter case there is a cause. But this is nothing more than a nominal difference. If phenomenon C has brute causes, nothing about the way it is *other than the mere fact that it exists* comes from its causes; its causes are simply the triggers by which C comes into being. Being mere triggers for the creation of C, the brute causes of C do not have any intrinsic, non-arbitrary relationship to C. Such a triggering relationship might hold between phenomenon C and a vast array of other phenomena. As a result, by accepting that phenomenon C has brute causes, we would not be able to rule out any phenomenon as a brute cause of C. We would have to accept that phenomenon C as well as any other possible phenomenon could arise at any time from any cause whatsoever. The view that there is brute causation is practically the same as the view that there are uncaused phenomena. And insofar as the relationship between a brutally emergent phenomenon and its emerged-from basis is just as arbitrary, brute emergence encounters the same problems as brute causation.

To summarise, brute emergence is a form of emergence in which the features of the emergent phenomenon are not given in the nature of the emerged-from basis. Insofar as emergent features are not traceable back to the nature of the emerged-from basis, these features arise as if via brute causation. The emergent features do not follow from anything about the nature of the emerged-from basis and so could arise from any basis at all. Ultimately, admitting brute emergence, brute causation or uncaused phenomena into a view of the world wreaks havoc with any attempts at dealing with reality as intelligible. This is why Strawson rejects brute emergence so forcefully, it is also the reason why any attempt to make sense of the world will need to jettison brute emergence as a viable possibility. From his recognition that experience is unquestionably real combined with his rejection of brute emergence, Strawson concludes that the distinctive features of experience can only emerge from phenomena that have those experiential features in their nature. This is why he pushes the 'realistic' physicalist towards accepting a view in which at least some of the fundamental constituents of a living, experiencing organism are, themselves, experiential.

5.4 Homogeneous Causes and Brute Emergence

If we wish to avoid assuming brute forms of emergence or causation and the serious problems that they bring, we would do well to adopt Dharmakīrti's approach to causation in which every event must have at least one cause that is 'ontologically homogeneous'.[39] As we explored in the previous chapter, according to Dharmakīrti and his Abhidharma predecessors, 'homogeneous' or 'substantial' causes (Sanskrit: *sabhāga-hetu*) are the factors that determine the distinctive character of a phenomenon, the intrinsic nature that makes it the type of phenomenon that it is.[40] A phenomenon must also have some non-

[39] Dan Arnold, 'Dharmakīrti's Dualism: Critical Reflections on a Buddhist Proof of Rebirth', *Philosophy Compass*, Vol. 3, No. 5, 2008, p.1083.

[40] See Richard P. Hayes, 'Dharmakīrti on Punarbhava', *Studies in Original Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism*, Vol. 1, 1993, p.116. While the term 'homogeneous cause' is

substantial, heterogeneous causes but these factors will simply condition the way in which the distinctive character of the phenomenon arises. In order for a phenomenon to be a homogeneous or substantial cause for another phenomenon, it must be the cause for that phenomenon having the intrinsic nature and distinctive character that it does. In order to do this, the homogeneous cause must have a distinctive character that explains the distinctive character of the caused phenomenon. If one phenomenon has a completely different, heterogeneous character from another phenomenon, it can only play a conditioning role.[41]

For example, among the homogeneous causes of a marble statue there must be something with the distinctive hardness of the statue, there must also be something with the distinctive shape of the statue. The hardness of marble provides the hardness of the marble statue but this hardness is shaped into a statue by heterogeneous factors. These heterogeneous factors are the tools of the sculptor, which have modified the marble into the shape of a statue. But the distinctive shape of the statue has as its homogeneous cause the intention of the sculptor. The particular shape that the sculptor intended to produce from the marble explains why the sculpture is that shape. But the intentions of the sculptor, as well as their skills and tools, are only contributory conditions for the hardness of the marble statue. They are insufficient to produce a marble statue, they can only condition the hard marble into a statue. Equally, the marble is only a contributory condition for the shape of the statue. A marble boulder cannot sculpt itself into a statue, it can only provide the material needed to realise the sculptor's intention.

Furthermore, in order for an event to occur it must have at least one homogeneous cause. Without a homogeneous cause, an event will lack any distinctive character, it will lack the basic particular property needed for it to be

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used in Dhammajoti's *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma,* p.190, Thompson uses 'substantial cause' to the same end in *Waking Dreaming Being,* pp.81-84.

[41] See Hayes, 'Dharmakīrti on Punarbhava', pp.116-117. For more on these heterogeneous causes see Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma,* pp.189-198.

anything at all. For brute emergence or brute causation to occur would be for a phenomenon to arise from contributory conditions, which trigger its arising, but without any homogeneous causes to determine its distinctive character. The problems facing the idea that brute emergence and brute causation are possible are equally present for the idea that a phenomenon can arise without homogeneous cause. And it is necessary for each distinctive characteristic of a phenomenon to be traceable back to a homogeneous cause.

Returning to the example, if a marble statue had no homogeneous causes at all, there would be nothing to explain its hardness, shape, or any of the distinctive features that define it. These features would have arisen arbitrarily, as if by magic. This would be brute causation. But it would also be brute causation for a marble boulder to turn into a precisely shaped statue of Hercules, complete with every culturally expected detail, without these precise features being traceable back to any prior process. It would equally be brute causation if a sculptor produced a marble statue from thin air, using only their tools and sculpting skills. In both these cases there is nothing giving the statue its details or its marble material, they have simply appeared from nowhere.

This is where the second premise for Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth comes from. As we explored in the last chapter, conscious mental events are distinctive in that they involve phenomenal qualities, reflexive self-awareness, and object-directedness. Insofar as we are ruling out brute causation or brute emergence, every such mental event must have homogeneous causes for its particular reflexive, object-directed, phenomenal quality. If these characteristics cannot be found among the homogeneous causes of a mental event, there must be something about the intrinsic nature of those causes that explains how these characteristics are produced. In either case, the homogeneous causes of mental events cannot be entirely devoid of consciousness-related characteristics.

Nevertheless, this does not yet get us the second premise of Dharmakīrti's argument. The second premise can be summed up as claiming that physical factors alone cannot produce consciousness *if the physical is devoid of mental or phenomenal characteristics.* But so far we only have reasons to believe that

physical factors alone cannot produce consciousness *if the physical is devoid of* ***the power to produce or constitute*** *mental or phenomenal characteristics.* Dharmakīrti's argument rests on the claim that a homogeneous cause *must* have the same quality as its effect. Strawson's argument against brute emergence, and by extension brute causation, has not yet established this. It still seems plausible to claim that physical factors that are devoid of consciousness could produce or constitute consciousness as long as it was part of their intrinsic nature to do so. This is exactly how Evan Thompson is able to qualify his acceptance of Dharmakīrti's second premise in *Waking Dreaming Being.*

In agreement with Strawson, Thompson does not believe subjective experiences could emerge from physical nature if it were fundamentally non-experiential. In this respect, Thompson adopts what he sees as the 'crucial insight' of Dharmakīrti's argument: if matter and mind have completely different natures, one cannot emerge from the other.[42] But Thompson is also uncomfortable with the mental-physical dualism inherent in Dharmakīrti's first premise and so joins Strawson in rejecting the claim that consciousness and physical reality have completely different natures.

And yet, Thompson does not wish to follow Strawson to panpsychist conclusions. Thompson wishes to develop an account of consciousness in which it emerges from physical nature without this either implying panpsychism or amounting to brute emergence. He suggests that the fundamental constituents of physical reality might have an experiential nature without necessarily being conscious in any normal sense. Physical being, according to Thompson, should be 'understood as naturally including, at its most fundamental level, the potential for consciousness or experiential being'.[43] What Thompson refers to as *potential* consciousness is precisely the kind of factor that is devoid of the characteristics of consciousness but has the *capacity*

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[42] Thompson, *Waking Dreaming Being*, p.104.
[43] Ibid., p.104.

to produce or otherwise constitute consciousness under the correct circumstances. So far, Strawson's argument against brute emergence has not decisively ruled out the 'qualified' emergence of consciousness from potential or proto-consciousness. This allows Thompson to suggest *qualified emergentism* as an alternative to panpsychism.

According to qualified emergentism, the emergence of consciousness from purely physical factors is possible because physical reality consists of *potential* consciousness. The qualification in Thompson's suggested form of emergentism is the fact that potential consciousness is a feature of physical reality. He is not claiming that consciousness emerges brutally from non-experiential physical factors but nor is he claiming that full-blown conscious experience can be found at every level of physical reality. By introducing the concept of *potential* consciousness, Thompson believes he can avoid the problems faced by the panpsychist who attributes rudimentary conscious states or 'micro-experiences' to microphysical phenomena like protons. This is a move which he thinks is an 'ad-hoc' position unsupported by evidence.[44] He also thinks it presents us with serious problems when we try to understand how conscious particles combine into a coherent conscious subject.

However, Thompson's notion of *potential* consciousness encounters a number of problems if we take it to be something that is devoid of the characteristics of consciousness but has the *power to produce or otherwise constitute consciousness* under the correct circumstances. These problems are explored by Strawson in an attempt to show that panpsychism is the logical conclusion once we have ruled out brute emergence. And, once again, Strawson's arguments help to show how the second premise of Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth does not accommodate Thompson's qualified emergentist position. Both Dharmakīrti and the panpsychist agree that physical factors alone cannot produce consciousness *if the physical is devoid of mental or phenomenal characteristics.* Strawson aims to show that the power to produce or constitute

[44] Ibid., p.105.

the characteristics of consciousness requires the presence of these characteristics.

5.5 Arguments against Potential and Proto-Consciousness

In his argument for panpsychism, Strawson explores the notion of the proto-experiential, that which gives rise to experience without being fully experiential. Strawson considers a variety of possible meanings of proto-experiential, some that might be equivalent to potential consciousness and others that are not.

Firstly, Strawson offers his preferred definition of the proto-experiential, in which it refers to that which is 'already intrinsically (occurrently) experiential, although very different, qualitatively, from the experience whose realizing ground we are supposing it be'.[45] This form of proto-experiential phenomenon would involve a degree of conscious experience, though not necessarily of a sort that we would be able to imagine. For example, as Thomas Nagel argues, the experiences of a bat must involve phenomenal qualities associated with echolocation that we simply cannot imagine.[46] Given that we struggle to imagine the phenomenal quality of a bat's experience, we should be ready to accept that any phenomenal qualities associated with the factors that precede our own conscious existence will be vastly beyond imagination.[47] It is the vast number of unimaginable possibilities for what such phenomenal qualities might be like that offers some justification for calling the factors in question proto-experiential. Using the term "proto-experience" distinguishes the unknown range of possible

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[45] Strawson, 'Realistic Monism', p.68.

[46] Thomas Nagel, 'What is it like to be a bat?', in *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1979, pp.165-180.

[47] To clarify, the claim here is not that a bat's experiences might be the basis for the emergence of my own conscious experiences. The factors from which my own conscious experiences emerge would be conscious subatomic particles according to the constitutive panpsychist, although they might be another type of entity. In either case, these entities would have experiences of a phenomenal quality unlike anything that arises in the experience of living organisms such as ourselves.

experiences associated with fundamental non-living physical nature from the less exotic range of experiences associated with living beings.

Nevertheless, while we could call these radically unimaginable experiences *proto-experiences* rather than just *experiences,* we could not avoid calling these experiences *conscious*. It is only insofar as this form of proto-experiential factor would involve consciousness that it can be considered a suitable basis from which our conscious experience could emerge. The proto-experiential, according to Strawson's favoured definition, still involves consciousness, albeit consciousness of radically unimaginable experiences. In contrast, *potential* consciousness, Thompson's favoured term, suggests a phenomenon that does not involve occurrently conscious experiences. For Thompson to adopt Strawson's preferred definition would involve the same fundamental commitments as panpsychism, commitments that Thompson wishes to avoid.

Thompson's definition of *potential consciousness* is closer to another presented by Strawson in which he takes proto-experiential to mean 'not actually experiential, but just what is needed for experience.'[48] According to this definition, the constituents of experience will not be experiential themselves but will nevertheless be the conditions needed for experience to arise. This is exactly what Thompson needs in order to avoid panpsychism. There are two possible interpretations of this definition.

According to one interpretation 'just what is needed for experience' means something like being intrinsically suited to 'giving rise to' or 'producing' experience: 'The idea will be that X remains *in itself* wholly and utterly non-experiential, but *gives rise to* something wholly ontologically distinct from itself'.[49] In this case the relationship between the proto-experiential phenomenon and conscious experience is not a constitutive one; proto-experiential factors do not combine to form experience, rather they produce it. As a result this is not so much a case of emergence as one of causation. Insofar

[48] Strawson, 'Realistic Monism', p.68.
[49] Ibid., p.69.

as Thompson makes reference to potential consciousness as a suitable basis for the non-brute emergence of ordinary consciousness, a causal account in which potential consciousness produces consciousness might not be what he is looking for.

In particular, the liquidity and convection cell analogies discussed in the previous section would become completely inappropriate in this case as they work as examples of emergence rather than causal production. Strawson for one is confident that 'nothing like this happens with liquidity and Bénard convection cells' describing such a power as 'magic'.[50] The reason for this description is that none of the proto-experiential phenomena are experiential and yet are supposedly able to produce from themselves a phenomenon with completely novel features. What makes the producers proto-experiential is that they have a special "brute" power to create experience.

Under this definition, proto-experiential factors break all of Dharmakīrti's rules of causation; they also collapse when we apply Abhidharma principles. Proto-experiences are the homogeneous causes for the distinctive characteristics of consciousness but are devoid of those characteristics. The intrinsic nature of proto-experiences would allow them to give rise to conscious experiences but would not involve the characteristics of those experiences. At this point the proto-experiential or potential consciousness can be analysed into two factors. On the one hand we have the special power to produce the distinctive characteristics of consciousness, its reflexivity, object-directedness, and phenomenal quality. On the other hand we have the intrinsic nature that makes this special power possible.

According to the Chariot Principle, if the special power of a given proto-experiential phenomenon is distinct from its intrinsic nature, that phenomenon cannot be said to exist as a single thing. In order for the intrinsic nature of proto-experiential phenomena to be able to give rise to consciousness, the special

[50] Ibid., p.70.

power to produce consciousness must be part of its intrinsic nature. In other words, it must be the nature of proto-experiential factors to give rise to the characteristics of consciousness. The only purpose of talking about proto-experiential factors is to explain the origins of the distinctive qualities of consciousness. This means that those characteristics must have their origins in the nature of the proto-experiential. But, under this definition, none of the characteristics of consciousness can be found in the proto-experiential, the proto-experiential simply produces them. For this reason, the defining characteristics of any given proto-experiential property must be the experiential property that it produces.

However, special powers of this kind are not intrinsic natures, they are simply powers to produce phenomena that *do* have intrinsic natures. A pure "power to produce" is defined exclusively by its product, it cannot be anything other than the trigger for the creation of an unprecedented phenomenon. To return to Howard Robinson's points about any conception of the world in which it is nothing but pure powers: 'A power is a power to produce some effect, but if everything is a power, it is the power to produce another power'.[51] Anything that is nothing over and above its tendency to produce something with an intrinsic nature can only be said to exist in virtue of the intrinsic nature that it produces.

Therefore, if potential consciousness or proto-experiential factors are nothing over and above their capacity to produce conscious experiences, they do not exist as anything in particular until their product appears. In this case, if we adhere to the Abhidharma standard of the real, a proto-experiential factor does not exist until it has produced the experiential phenomenon that defines its special power. In this case, any given proto-experiential factor cannot exist *prior* to the experiential phenomenon that it is producing. But this puts the cart before the horse. Proto-experiential potential consciousness cannot exist until it has

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[51] Howard Robinson, 'Idealism', *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind,* Brian McLaughlin, Ansgar Beckermann, and Sven Walter (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2009*,* p.192. See also Simon Blackburn 'Filling In Space', *Analysis,* Vol. 50, No. 2, March 1990, pp.62-65.

produced consciousness but cannot produce consciousness if it does not exist. What has happened here is that we have defined something by nothing more than what it does. If proto-experientiality is nothing other than the capacity to produce experiences, it is literally nothing but the occasional production of experiences. Such a capacity only exists as and when experiences are produced, but this means that it does nothing to explain why those phenomena are arising.

A *pure power to produce* is simply not the sort of thing that can exist if we are adhering to Abhidharma principles because its defining characteristic, that which makes it anything at all, is the characteristic that it produces. This is why proto-experiential phenomena or potential consciousness cannot exist if they are nothing but a special power to produce conscious experience.

However, if we try to backtrack and define proto-experiential phenomena in terms of their own intrinsic nature, this nature will have to be fundamentally distinct from the nature of conscious experience. In this case there is nothing about the intrinsic nature of proto-experiential phenomena that explains their capacity to produce experiential phenomena. We will be back to brute causation insofar as one set of phenomena is giving rise to a particular phenomenon without there being anything about the nature of the causal phenomena that gives us the features of the newly arising phenomenon. Insofar as proto-experiential phenomena are devoid of consciousness, they do not possess the characteristics of the phenomenon that they produce.

In this way, the application of Abhidharma principles further reveals why the definition of proto-experiential in which it involves the brute production of conscious experience is so problematic. Strawson is correct to suspect that a special power to produce the experiential from the non-experiential would be some kind of magic. Insofar as this definition of proto-experiential only works if it implies brute causal production, Strawson strongly doubts that it will work for a physicalist because they will have to ‘throw away the conservation principles and say that brand new physical stuff (mass/energy) is produced or given rise to when experiences are emergent from the non-experiential, i.e. all the time,

as we and other animals live our lives.'[52] Instead of causation being the confluence of factors into new combinations or iterations of those same factors, causation would involve the creation of completely unprecedented types of physical reality with unprecedented characteristics. This definition of proto-experience implies brute causation and so is one that the physicalist should reject. It is also a possibility that, as we have seen so far in this chapter, should be rejected if we are looking for an account of reality in which it is at least marginally intelligible.

For these reasons, Strawson rejects as unworkable the causal interpretation of the proto-experiential according to which it 'remains *in itself* wholly and utterly non-experiential, but *gives rise to* something wholly ontologically distinct from itself'.[53] And in the light of the problems facing such a definition, Thompson could not plausibly present potential consciousness as an unconscious producer of consciousness. Instead, he could adopt a definition of potential consciousness according to which it is the proto-experiential *constituents* of experience. These would be factors that are not themselves conscious but become conscious when put together. This is the only remaining definition of potential consciousness that Thompson could adopt in order for his qualified emergentist alternative to panpsychism to work.

Nevertheless, even this is a definition that Strawson finds problematic. If potential consciousness or proto-experiential factors are devoid of experiential properties, then there is a qualitative jump from non-experiential properties to experiential ones when we move from the constituent scale to the scale of the whole. This is not the sort of jump that we encounter with the emergence of liquidity because, as Strawson points out, 'liquid bodies of water and H2O molecules have exactly the same sorts of properties'.[54] Liquidity is not a property found in H2O molecules but it is a property that can be fully explicated using shape-size-mass-charge-number-position-motion-involving physics

[52] Strawson, 'Realistic Monism', p.70.
[53] Ibid., p.69.
[54] Ibid., p.68.

notions. Whether at the scale of H2O molecules or liquid bodies of water we are dealing with a phenomenon with the same type of characteristics.

Strawson's doubts about the workability of this second definition of proto-experientiality stem from his doubts about the possibility of analysing conscious experience into unconscious constituents. Such analysis would require that a close look at experience reveals that it is ultimately nothing more than a combination of intrinsically unconscious factors.

Once again we can apply Abhidharma principles to show why Strawson's doubts are spot-on. An application of the Chariot Principle shows that an analysis of conscious experience into unconscious factors should be impossible. If conscious experience is nothing over and above a configuration of intrinsically unconscious factors, consciousness cannot be present in any of the factors that constitutes conscious experience. Consciousness would have to be a mere label applied to the configuration of the constituents. In this case there would be no distinctive characteristic that makes consciousness what it is. But when we analyse conscious experience into the myriad sensory, cognitive, and emotional phenomenal qualities, the awareness directed towards them and its reflexive self-awareness, we can see that each and every one of these factors involves consciousness. Consciousness does not disappear under analysis.

Of course, one might doubt that an analysis of conscious experience "from the inside" can reveal the constituents of conscious experience. After all, in the previous chapter we saw that Thompson claims that 'the phenomenal character of an experience isn't "transparent" with regard to its physical embodiment'.[55] For Thompson, conscious experiences cannot tell us anything about the factors producing those experiences or the full range of conditions on which those experiences depend.

[55] Thompson, *Waking Dreaming Being*, p.94.

But Thompson is claiming that conscious experience doesn't reveal the factors that produced it, he is not claiming that conscious experience doesn't reveal its constitutive factors. As an example, we cannot examine a marble statue in order to discover who carved it but we can examine the statue to discover that it is made out of marble. In the same way, an examination of a conscious experience will not reveal the processes that produced it but it should reveal the constituents that it is composed of.

Furthermore, barring brute causation, the processes that produced a conscious experience will have made it out of its constitutive factors. This is analogous to the fact that a sculptor will have carved the statue out of marble, they will not have produced the marble. This is in fact one of the ways in which Dharmakīrti, as well as Buddhist philosophers and meditators generally, can challenge Thompson's doubts about the veracity of their introspective observations. Although the contributing conditions that produce conscious experience might remain hidden even from acutely concentrated awareness, the homogeneous causes that constitute what conscious experience *is* must be observable.

Nevertheless, one might still question why we would assume that conscious experience is supposed to be transparent as to its own constitution. After all, even materials like marble cannot be fully known through natural human means of observation. Electron microscopes and such like are needed to get to the bottom of their nature. Examining marble with human senses does not reveal the electrons, protons, and neutrons that constitute it. But this does not count as a reason against the view that simple physical constituents combine to form the complex structures of marble that appear very different to us. A complex physical construct can appear very different from the fundamental physical factors that constitute it because the way that we subjectively experience physical objects is not necessarily what they objectively are.

However, as both Strawson and Nagel have pointed out, you can't say the same for subjective experience itself. The subjective experience of something is precisely *how it seems to us*. We can't then say that a subjective, conscious experience is not *really* how it seems. The appearance-reality distinction has to

give way eventually, lest we fall into a vicious infinite regress.[56] With this in mind, we can say that if non-experiential proto-experiences do not *seem* to be the constituents of our conscious experiences, this *does* give us reason to doubt that the former construct the latter. If we could not experience the constituents of a conscious experience, it would not be possible to experience the complex conscious experience that they construct.

If conscious experience is a complex configuration of factors it is presumably nothing over and above the configuration of these constituents. For this reason the characteristics of the complex should reduce easily to the constituents. To claim otherwise would be to commit to the view that potentially conscious proto-experiential constituents can form into a phenomenon with features over and above those of its constituents. According to such a view the features of complex conscious experience would not be traceable back to its constituent factors, an analysis of consciousness would not reveal unconscious constituents. But the overall claim here is that conscious experience cannot be analysed into unconscious factors but that it nonetheless emerges from them. These unanalysable features of conscious experience must either be accounted for with reference to a further factor or must arise through brute emergence. If conscious experience involves a single feature that cannot be traced back to the features of its constituent factors then we are dealing with some degree of brute emergence. In this case there is no benefit in appealing to potential consciousness in order to avoid brute emergence. It is for these reasons that we should follow Strawson and maintain that conscious

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[56] Strawson, 'Real Materialism', p.41. See also Thomas Nagel, 'Subjective and objective', in *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1979, p.207. This is not to say that how we think about or conceptualise our subjective experiences will always be accurate. Rather the point is that the basic *subjective* characteristics of consciousness cannot simply be an illusion. For their part, Abhidharma systems generally agree that the fundamental factors that constitute conscious experience are observable although these might differ from our usual, superficial understanding of what we are experiencing. See Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma,* pp.15-26 and Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma,* pp.18-26.

experience cannot be constituted by non-experiential factors *if* it cannot be analysed into them.

To offer a Buddhist philosophical gloss on this argument, any complex phenomenon must be constituted by the distinctive characteristics from which it borrows its nature. It is these distinctive characteristics that make the complex phenomenon what it is. Such characteristics are the homogeneous causes of the complex phenomenon. If conscious experience is a complex phenomenon, it borrows its nature from the homogeneous causes that make it what it is. For this reason, the homogeneous causes of conscious experience must involve the distinctive characteristics of conscious experience itself. We would therefore do well to adopt the second premise of Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth on these grounds. Consciousness cannot arise solely from any factors, physical or otherwise, if those factors are devoid of the mental and phenomenal characteristics of consciousness. The factors that give rise to consciousness only have the capacity to produce or constitute consciousness, along with its distinctive characteristics, because these distinctive characteristics are present in the original factors themselves. Productive power on its own is not a distinctive characteristic and so does not amount to something real enough to explain how consciousness arises.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how arguments in support of panpsychism, particularly those presented by Galen Strawson, can also support the second premise of Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth. Philosophers such as Russell, Strawson, Robinson, and Pereboom have shown how a conception of physical reality in which it is devoid of any categorical properties is nothing but a pure structure, empty of any defining qualities. Physics offers a purely mathematical, causal, and structural vision of reality and so cannot be taken as an exhaustive account of the world. In contrast, conscious experience involves the categorical properties that physics leaves out, phenomenal properties like those arising in experiences such as colours, sounds, sensations and so on. These sorts of

properties are not determined purely in terms of relationships with other properties, they are categorical. This can be compared with the Abhidharma Buddhist approach to reality in which the ultimately real constituents of reality are *dharmas* with their own intrinsic nature or quality. As with phenomenal properties, the nature and quality of these *dharmas* can only be directly experienced.

Strawson goes on to argue that to suggest that the defining qualities found in conscious experience emerge from factors devoid of these qualities would be to posit a *brute* form of emergence. Emergence is brute when there is a jump during the emergence process from one set of qualities to a completely different set. The emergence of liquid water from H2O molecules involves no such jump. Characteristics that constitute H2O, which involve mass, space, charge, and so on, are also those that constitute liquid water. There is nothing about what liquid water is that cannot be traced back to the movement of H2O molecules. If we introduce qualitative jumps during the emergence process, emergent properties will be completely unprecedented and their emergence will be unintelligible. Nothing about the intrinsic nature of the emerged-from constituents would explain the qualities of the emergent-phenomenon. Introducing brute forms of emergence makes the world immediately unintelligible. For this reason, Strawson recommends we reject the possibility of brute emergence. Therefore, the definitive qualities of conscious experience can only have emerged from factors that have an intrinsic nature that explains the arising of these qualities.

At this point we explored Evan Thompson's qualified emergence, in which consciousness emerges from *potential* consciousness, which is not intrinsically conscious but has the capacity to give rise to consciousness. We saw why a definition of potential consciousness in which it is intrinsically devoid of consciousness but has the power to produce consciousness is untenable. This is because potential consciousness must have an intrinsic nature and a special power to produce something else does not amount to an intrinsic nature. But without either an intrinsically conscious nature or a special power to produce consciousness, potential consciousness could only give rise to consciousness via brute causation. This leaves a definition of potential consciousness in which

it is intrinsically devoid of consciousness but can be configured so as to give rise to consciousness. The only way in which such a definition would work is if conscious experience can be analysed into distinctive characteristics, none of which involves consciousness. But conscious experience does not seem to be amenable to such an analysis, each aspect of consciousness seems to involve consciousness and when it comes to conscious experience *seeming is being.* If it lacks the characteristics found in consciousness, potential consciousness does not seem to be the sort of thing that could produce consciousness.

We therefore have good reason to accept the second premise of Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth. Among the causes of consciousness there must be factors that share in the characteristics of consciousness. The next chapter will take these arguments further and explore reasons to believe that consciousness is not analysable into separate factors.

6. The Constitution of Conscious Experience

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored the reasons for accepting the second premise of Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth: conscious mental events cannot arise from factors that are completely devoid of the distinctive characteristics of consciousness. This is because a conscious event, like any other phenomenon, must have at least one homogeneous cause (Sanskrit: *sabhāga-hetu*).[1] The homogeneous causes of an event are those factors that give the event its distinctive qualities. A homogeneous cause can refer to an event that occurred prior to the phenomenon in question but it can also refer to a constituent factor of that phenomenon. A marble statue can have, among its homogeneous causes, the marble boulder from which it was carved but also the marble material of which it is composed. This is because the distinctive qualities that make a marble boulder what it is have given rise to the distinctive qualities that make the statue a *marble* statue. Insofar as the distinctive qualities of the marble boulder disappear into the statue, there is a sense in which the marble boulder has *become* the material that *constitutes* the statue. To say that both are homogeneous causes of the marble statue is to say that both are responsible for the marble qualities found in the statue. One of these homogeneous causes is the preceding cause; the other is the constituting cause.

However, a preceding homogeneous cause must *disappear into* an event in order to *become* a constituting homogeneous cause of that event. If the preceding cause does not disappear into, and in a sense *become* a constitutive cause, it must have the power to produce or create a separate constitutive cause from nothing. But such a brute creative power is not a distinctive quality and so cannot be a *homogeneous* cause because it has a completely different

[1] See Bhikkhu K. L. Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma,* Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong, 2007, p.190.

character from the phenomenon that it produces. In this case, the brute creative cause could not be responsible for the distinctive qualities of the phenomenon that it produces; these qualities would have come from nowhere. For example, the distinctive qualities of a marble boulder are not responsible for the distinctive qualities of a marble statue if it is the *brute creative power* of the boulder that produces the material that constitutes the statue. In this case, none of the boulder's qualities have gone into constituting the statue. The only way that the marble boulder can be the homogeneous cause for the marble statue is if the distinctive qualities of the former disappear as they give rise to the latter.

Likewise, if a phenomenon does not have any preceding homogeneous causes, its constitutive causes must have come out of nowhere. A marble statue without preceding homogeneous causes must be made of material that popped into existence when the statue did. Such magical production is what we can call brute causation. If we accept that brute causation is possible, the world cannot be intelligible. We must reject the possibility of brute causation in order to make sense of the world. Therefore, every phenomenon must have preceding homogeneous causes, which *become* its constitutive factors.

In this way, every phenomenon must have constitutive homogeneous causes, constituents which determine precisely what that phenomenon is. If the constituting causes of a phenomenon did not have the distinctive qualities of the phenomenon in question, these qualities would have to appear as if by magic when those constituents come together. This would be what we can call brute emergence. As was explored in the previous chapter, if we accept that brute emergence is possible, we face the same problems as if we accepted that brute causation were possible. Therefore, the constitutive homogeneous causes of any phenomenon must have the qualities necessary to explain precisely what it is, while the preceding homogeneous causes must *become* these constitutive homogeneous causes. When applied to conscious mental phenomena, this approach to causation entails that the distinctive qualities of such phenomena must be traceable back to their constituents and the distinctive qualities of these constituents must have existed in a preceding form.

In the previous chapter we explored two opposing views on where to take Dharmakīrti's argument from here. According to Galen Strawson, the fundamental constituents of conscious phenomena must themselves be conscious. In Strawson's terminology, the fundamental constituents of the experiential must themselves be experiential. He does not believe that purely non-experiential phenomena could give rise to experiential phenomena, such a situation would involve brute emergence. His reasoning is rooted in the premise that experiential phenomena cannot be analysed into non-experiential factors. Insofar as experience is precisely what it *seems to be*, our inability to analyse experience into non-experiential factors counts against the claim that experience is constituted by non-experiential factors. For this reason, experience would have to brutally emerge if it emerged from non-experiential factors. Strawson's argument supports Dharmakīrti's position regarding the need for the preceding homogeneous causes of conscious mental events to be prior conscious mental events. And while Dharmakīrti uses this position to argue for an unbroken stream of consciousness, Strawson uses it to argue for the panpsychist view that the physical constituents of organisms such as ourselves are conscious entities.

However, a contrasting view comes from Evan Thompson. He is uncomfortable with Dharmakīrti's dualistic suggestion that consciousness is an additional factor to the physical factors of the body and brain. But he is also uncomfortable with Galen Strawson's panpsychism. Thompson suggests that the homogeneous causes of conscious experience might be *potential consciousness.* These would be factors that are not themselves conscious but give rise to consciousness when configured together. Consciousness would be an emergent property, in a "qualified" sense, of *potentially* conscious factors.

In order to avoid positing brute emergence, a qualified emergentist like Thompson must take Strawson up on the challenge of analysing conscious experience into non-conscious factors. Any non-conscious or *potentially* conscious factors that constitute conscious experience must appear as features of conscious experience. This is because conscious experience is, by definition, appearance itself and the constituents of appearance must "show up" insofar

as their presence makes appearance different in a particular, recognisable way. Therefore, in order to challenge the view that conscious experience cannot be analysed into purely non-conscious factors, the opponent of Dharmakīrti and the panpsychist must analyse what Strawson calls experientiality into further factors, none of which have all the features that he describes as experiential.

However, in his argument for panpsychism, Strawson does not consider what he calls experientiality to be analysable into anything other than further forms of experientiality. For Strawson, experientiality is synonymous with conscious experience and this is why I have used the two terms as synonymous thus far. In his major essays 'Real Materialism' and 'Realistic Monism', Strawson refers to experientiality in a way that does not ultimately distinguish between experiences, consciousness, the experienced objects of consciousness, and the phenomenal quality of these object-experiences. This is despite the fact that a conscious experience seems to be analysable into, on the one hand, an object of experience and, on the other hand, the awareness of that object. For Strawson, the distinction between phenomenal objects and the awareness of them does not entail that the two are separable elements.[2]

The initial part of this chapter will explore the reasons behind Strawson's view and the reasons for rejecting the idea that conscious experience can be separated into unexperienced objects and object-less awareness. In this way, the chapter will present further reasons for rejecting the qualified emergence of conscious experience from mere potentials for conscious experience. The chapter will then go on to address the fact that Strawson's constitutive version of panpsychism presents a threat to Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth. In particular, the view that a single stream of conscious experience survives death and continues into future lives is not compatible with constitutive panpsychism. This is why an argument against constitutive panpsychism will be presented in

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[2] Galen Strawson, 'Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism', in *Real Materialism and other essays,* Oxford University Press, 2008, p.72. See also Galen Strawson, 'What is the Relation Between an Experience, the Subject of the Experience, and the Content of the Experience?', in *Real Materialism and other essays,* Oxford University Press, 2008, pp.151-187.

order to show that the conscious subject of our current conscious experience cannot be produced from multiple conscious subjects.

6.2 Conscious Experience: Analysis and Separation

As already mentioned, Strawson does not think that it is possible to separate the object of a phenomenal experience from the awareness of it. This is despite the fact that we can recognise that conscious experience involves *both* a phenomenon *and* an awareness *of* this phenomenon. Here the panpsychist seems, initially, to be at odds with the Abhidharma Chariot Principle according to which any phenomenon that can be analysed into its constitutive parts or distinct aspects cannot be taken as an ultimate reality. If we apply the Chariot Principle to a conscious experience by analysing it into its constituent features we find that the awareness of a phenomenon has a distinct nature from the phenomenon itself. If conscious experience has, as distinct features, an objective aspect (the phenomenon) as well as a subjective aspect (the awareness *of* that phenomenon), conscious experience cannot be a simple or unanalysable constituent of reality.

But this does not, however, mean that these two aspects of a conscious experience can be *separated* from one another. This is because there are two ways in which the application of the Chariot principle can reveal that a phenomenon is fundamental. Firstly, when applying the Chariot Principle, it is possible that analysis might reveal a distinct phenomenon that cannot be analysed into further discrete constituents. It might be that the phenomenon is so simple that you can neither divide nor analyse it into more features. This would be because the phenomenon in question is an absolutely simple *dharma.*

However, there is also a second possibility. As explored in the fourth chapter (section 4.4), there may be a phenomenon that can be analysed into distinct features but cannot be actually divided or separated into these features. Such features would be those that cannot be separated from others without disappearing altogether. In this case, the complex configuration can be analysed into features, some of which cannot exist separately from the

configuration itself. If a seemingly complex phenomenon has features that cannot exist when separated from others, the phenomenon could not have arisen as a result of these features coming together from a state of separation. The inseparable features must have always already been together in order to exist at all. These inseparable features would form a “cluster” that is analysable but nonetheless indivisible. This would not be a *dharma* but it would be an *indivisible cluster* of dharmas.[3] Such clusters are indivisible because the absence of certain constituents would destroy the possibility of the cluster ever existing.

With this in mind, we can surmise that if either the objective or subjective aspect of a conscious experience could not exist without the other, there is no way in which conscious experience could be the result of the coming together of the two. The combination in question could never have occurred because before it took place the two factors would have been separate. But if one factor cannot exist separately from the other, there cannot be a point *before* the combination of the two factors. For this reason we can say that such factors form an indivisible cluster. The panpsychist view that conscious experience cannot be *separated* into phenomenal awareness and phenomenal object although it can be *analysed* into them is viable insofar as these two factors form an indivisible cluster. Shortly we will look at the reasons for believing conscious experiences are such indivisible clusters but first we must clarify precisely which two factors we are claiming are inseparable.

6.3 Against Unexperienced Phenomenally Propertied Objects

Firstly, it is important to clarify that the phenomenally propertied objects that appear within conscious experience are distinct from any unexperienced

[3] See Bhikkhu K. L. Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma,* Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong, 2007, pp.255,275. See also Y. Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma: Its Inquiry Into the Nature of Conditioned Reality*, Centre for Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong, 2010, pp.76-83, 205-210.

entities that we might wish to claim those experiences are *of.* Such entities might well exist without conscious experience but this is simply because, being unexperienced, such entities do not play a constitutive role in conscious experience. The important point here, one that both Strawson and Thompson recognise, is that we do not know objects outside of their appearance in conscious experience.[4] We encounter objects *as* the content of conscious experiences. Every object that we know of is known through its appearance within our consciousness. This appearance is precisely what that object is like *for us,* which is to say the overall phenomenal quality of the appearing object. The phenomenal quality of an appearing object can be described in terms of *its* phenomenal properties. Nevertheless, phenomenal properties are not so much properties *belonging* to the object as they are the qualities that constitute the appearing object. Ultimately the phenomenal properties of an object cannot be separated from the appearing object because the object is only known in terms of the phenomenal qualities, or properties, that constitute its appearance within our consciousness.

For example, we do not experience a sunset *and also* its phenomenal properties; the sunset, as we experience it, *is* those phenomenal properties or qualities that constitute the experience. If watching a sunset is the beautiful activity of attending to the magnificent orb of orange-red light as it descends into a shining strip of watery horizon, then it is precisely every feature of this experience, including our consciousness of it. What it is like to watch a sunset *is* the conscious experience of watching a sunset. Without there being this phenomenal character, this 'what it is like' to watch a sunset, there would be no subjective experience of watching the sunset. We can, of course, imagine someone watching a sunset in a purely objective manner without there being any subjective experiences involved but such an image would exist *for us and not them*. The person watching the sunset in this case is simply what David

[4] See Evan Thompson, *Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy*, Columbia University Press, 2015, pp.100-1. See also Strawson, 'Realistic Monism', p.53.

Chalmers describes as a 'Philosophical Zombie', an object behaving in such a way that we can say "they are watching a sunset", there would be no visual experiences for them in this case.[5]

Therefore, while we cannot simply rule out the possibility of mind-independent objects devoid of all phenomenal properties, such objects do not play a constitutive role in conscious experience. When we analyse conscious experience we do not find mind-independent objects, we find phenomenally propertied objects, which are known because of the way that they "show up" in conscious experience. These objects might also involve non-phenomenal properties but such properties or qualities, by their very nature, do not appear within conscious experience. While mind-independent objects and non-phenomenal factors might condition conscious experience by modifying the phenomenal qualities that constitute it, they do not themselves constitute what conscious experience is like. Mind-independent phenomena and non-phenomenal qualities are not constitutive homogeneous causes of conscious experience, they do not give conscious experience its distinctive characteristics. If we were to separate phenomenally propertied objects from mind-independent objects, conscious experience would still have its distinctive phenomenal qualities. This is why such a separation does not reduce conscious experience to something that is not conscious experience.

6.4 The Inseparability of Consciousness and Phenomenal Properties

The panpsychist's claim is that we cannot separate phenomenally propertied objects from the object-directed consciousness of them. This is why conscious experience cannot be separated into non-conscious factors. And yet, it does seem plausible to imagine an isolated object-directed consciousness to which phenomenal objects *could* appear and independent objects with special

[5] See David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, Oxford University Press, 1997, p.94.

properties that only become fully apparent when consciousness is present. We might call these special properties “proto-phenomenal” properties. They would be the properties of objects that result in there being a particular phenomenal quality that appears within conscious experience *if and when* these properties are apprehended by consciousness.

For example, the particular orange-red of a setting sun would appear as it does due to particular proto-phenomenal properties involved in the visual process when watching a sunset. These proto-phenomenal properties would not intrinsically *appear* orange-red but they would be the conditions in virtue of which orange-red phenomenal qualities appeared as and when there was consciousness of them.

The problem here is that we are not able to *analyse* conscious experience into consciousness and the proto-phenomenal properties of objects. This is because such proto-phenomenal properties do not appear within conscious experience. The full-blown phenomenal appearance of an orange-red sun exists within conscious experience, it does not exist when there is no phenomenal consciousness for it to appear to. When taken separately, neither phenomenal consciousness nor the particular proto-phenomenal properties of sunset watching involve the distinctive orange-red visual phenomenal quality whose origins we are trying to explain. Although it is quite plausible to suggest that there are conditioning factors that determine when orange-red visual experiences appear within conscious experience, if these factors have no intrinsic phenomenal quality they cannot be the constitutive homogeneous causes that make orange-red experience what it is. It is for these reasons that we cannot easily assume that the particular phenomenal qualities of colours, sounds, smells, sensations, and so on can exist when not experienced.

There are, of course, philosophers who entertain the possibility of special qualities or ‘qualia’ that are not intrinsically conscious but nonetheless are

precisely the phenomenal qualities that we consciously experience.[6] Strawson, however, rejects outright the possibility of phenomenal experiences that are not phenomenally experienced.[7] To accept such a possibility is to accept the existence of phenomenal qualities that are devoid of their nature *as an appearance within conscious experience.* It would be incorrect to refer to such unexperienced qualities as *phenomenal* in any sense since they would not be appearances. And yet it is precisely *how they appear as conscious experiences* that makes the phenomenal qualities of colours, sounds, sensations, and so on *what they are*. The visual and emotional experiences involved in watching a sunset are conscious experiences and to posit entirely unconscious versions of them seems to involve positing a version of them that has been stripped of all defining features. This is why non-conscious proto-phenomenal qualities cannot be homogeneous constitutive causes for particular phenomenal qualities. Any such proto-phenomenal quality will lack the distinct characteristic that makes a particular phenomenal quality what it is.

As we saw in the last chapter, purely physical accounts of phenomena such as sunsets, birdsong, and emotions, are structural and causal accounts devoid of the categorical features that make conscious experiences what they are. A standard physical account will therefore be insufficient to account for the existence of phenomenal properties. But even if we adopt an agnostic Russellian Monist position and suggest that there are unknown categorical features within physical objects, which determine the phenomenal properties of conscious experiences, these will need to have features that are capable of accounting for phenomenal properties *as phenomenal.* It is no use positing a set of categorical features in order to explain why the experience of birdsong has the phenomenal quality that it does if these explanatory features are devoid of all phenomenal properties. And phenomenal properties are fundamentally the properties of conscious experiences. This is why we might take the view

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[6] Sam Coleman, 'The Real Combination Problem: Panpsychism, Micro-Subjects, and Emergence', *Erkenntnis*, Vol. 79, No. 1, February, 2014, pp.39,40.

[7] See Strawson, 'What is the Relation Between an Experience, the Subject of the Experience, and the Content of the Experience?', p.152.

that the phenomenal qualities that constitute our experiences must be conscious by their very nature.

However, if we deny that unexperienced phenomenal properties or qualities are possible we will need to assume that all possible phenomenal characteristics are continually appearing within conscious experience. The fact that I can go and watch the sunset, have a delightful experience, and then go and experience something else, seems to rule out the idea that the phenomenal properties of the sunset continue within my own consciousness. That said, according to the Yogācāra school of Buddhism, there is in fact a subtle level of consciousness in which phenomenal qualities, such as those that arise when watching a sunset, are preserved.[8] Alternatively we might posit an omniscient consciousness that maintains phenomenal qualities when others are not apprehending them; this is what philosopher Bishop George Berkeley suggested.[9]

Understandably, we might conclude that these possibilities commit us to far too much. For simplicity's sake, we might maintain that neither a storehouse level of consciousness nor the warehouse-mind of God are required. But this is where Strawson's constitutive panpsychist view provides its solution.

According to the constitutive version of panpsychism, the specific phenomenal qualities that make watching a sunset what it is are always, by their very nature, conscious experiences, even if they do not combine into the particular conscious experience of watching a sunset. In this case it seems as if Strawson will need something like the Yogācāra storehouse level of consciousness or Berkeley's warehouse god to preserve the intrinsically conscious features of phenomenal qualities. But Strawson and others do not follow this route. The constitutive panpsychist position that Strawson adopts is one in which a sunset,

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[8] See Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp.248,249.

[9] See Howard Robinson, 'Idealism', *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind,* Brian McLaughlin, Ansgar Beckermann, and Sven Walter (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2009.

for example, does not appear to a single consciousness and then disappear into god's mind or drop into a storehouse consciousness. Rather, each phenomenal quality involved in a conscious experience contributes its own intrinsic consciousness to the mix. Each of these micro-experiential consciousnesses combines to form a single conscious experience of, for example, a sunset.

Furthermore, a panpsychist like Strawson is able to claim the mantle of physicalist insofar as the constituents of conscious experience are physical entities, albeit entities with experiential properties. A constitutive panpsychist such as Strawson approaches the task of separating conscious experience into constituent factors by distinguishing not between consciousness and the objects of that consciousness but between the different phenomenal qualities that constitute a given conscious experience. Given the serious issues facing attempts to separate phenomenal qualities from phenomenal consciousness, Strawson, along with other constitutive panpsychists, takes the view that the only workable way to separate a conscious experience into constituent factors is to separate it into phenomenal qualities. If there are constitutive factors that combine to form our conscious experiences it is the fundamental phenomenal qualities that constitute the overall phenomenal quality of the experience.

For example, in the case of watching a sunset, Strawson might suggest that each phenomenal property of the experience, from the spots of red-orange colour to the rush of appreciation felt at the beauty of the scene, is a constituent factor in the whole experience. And, for the constitutive panpsychist, these phenomenal properties or qualities are micro-experiences, they are always phenomenally conscious irrespective of any ordinary physical properties that they might also have.[10] So the visual points of red-orange colour and the sensation of appreciation are *intrinsically conscious micro-experiences* regardless of whether or not they are part of our macro-experience of watching

[10] Galen Strawson, 'Real Materialism', in *Real Materialism and other essays,* Oxford University Press, 2008, p.23.

the sunset. Being intrinsically conscious qualities, these micro-experiences have been *conscious* experiences since before they constituted our experience and will continue to be *conscious* experiences afterwards.

It is therefore part and parcel of constitutive panpsychism to hold that each micro-experience has its own individual consciousness. For each fundamental constituent of an experience there is a consciousness, or subject, of that constituent micro-experience. In order for a phenomenal quality to be a conscious experience, it must appear to a conscious subject. Constitutive panpsychists such a Strawson therefore posit a conscious subject for each and every fundamental phenomenal quality, this conscious subject renders the micro-experience a conscious experience of a particular phenomenal quality rather than merely an unexperienced proto-phenomenal quality. It follows from this view that, at any given time, our individual consciousness of multiple phenomenal qualities is the result of the combination of the multiple individual consciousnesses associated with each of those phenomenal qualities. Micro-experiences are therefore micro-consciousnesses and these combine to form our complex human consciousness.[11]

According to the constitutive panpsychist account, every constituent of conscious experience is intrinsically conscious. This is why there is no emergence of consciousness from an unconscious basis, nor is there a point at which consciousness decomposes into non-conscious constituents. The similarities between what Strawson is suggesting about the origins and fate of consciousness and what Dharmakīrti tries to prove should not be overlooked. If we take the concrete reality of conscious experience as seriously as Strawson does, if we also accept his argument against brute emergence, and if we accept that conscious experiences cannot be analysed into non-conscious factors, then we have good reason to believe that our current conscious experiences

[11] See Strawson, ‘Realistic Monism’, p.72.

will continue in some conscious form in future and also existed in a conscious form before our conception and birth.

However, what Strawson's account does not suggest is that there is an individual stream of conscious experiences that continues from one life to another. For the constitutive panpsychist, every moment of consciousness is constructed from micro-experiences, which are physical entities that come and go from the brain. This position is given a clear summary in Sam Coleman's article 'The Real Combination Problem: Panpsychism, Micro-Subjects, and Emergence':

> Any phenomenal qualities figuring in the macro-experience are put there through being carried by the phenomenally-qualitied ultimates jointly composing the relevant part of the subject's brain. Thus we can trace the macro-phenomenology to the phenomenal states of the ultimates in a smooth way, and panpsychists can account for the macro-experiential state in terms of the matter composing it. This explanatory operation is essentially no more difficult than accounting for the overall composition of a painted canvas by reference to the various patches of paint filling it, along with their qualities. In the case of phenomenal paint, this is achieved by taking phenomenal qualities to belong to basic matter, and by taking this matter not only to materially constitute the subject, but to *phenomenally compose* her experiential field as well; that is to say, the phenomenal quality of each experiential field-composing ultimate finds its way into the conscious state enjoyed by the subject.[12]

In this way, Strawson's constitutive panpsychist position is more than compatible with a view in which an individual conscious subject is a short-lived configuration of physical micro-subjects, which quickly decomposes. Strawson even imagines that this individual conscious subject may not last much longer than a few seconds before decomposing into physical constituents that are flushed out of the relevant neurons.[13] Alternatively an individual consciousness might be a physical structure that remains stable throughout a lifetime before collapsing into micro-experiences when the body dies. Any number of

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[12] Coleman, 'The Real Combination Problem', p.24.

[13] See Strawson, 'What is the Relation Between an Experience, the Subject of the Experience, and the Content of the Experience?', pp.183-185.

possibilities can be imagined using a constitutive panpsychist framework but, in any of these cases, what we call an individual consciousness is the intersection of many streams of conscious phenomenal qualities.

While it might be possible to accept Strawson's version of panpsychism and attempt to develop a version of rebirth in which it refers to the continual recycling of micro-experiences, this would differ from the traditional Buddhist account. According to the account that Dharmakīrti tries to defend, there is an unbroken stream of mental factors that continues from one lifetime to another without decomposing into distinct consciousnesses. Each stream of mental factors is individuated and it is for this reason that an individual mental stream can be said to continue throughout multiple lives of birth, death, and rebirth. This is at odds with a constitutive panpsychist approach to consciousness in which birth involves the combination of micro-experiences into an individual consciousness and death involves the decomposition of this consciousness into multiple micro-experiences. In such a case there would not be an individual stream of consciousness that continues from one life to another; the traditional Buddhist multi-life perspective would be untenable. It is for this reason that Strawson's constitutive panpsychism, unlike his argument against brute emergence, presents a serious challenge to arguments for rebirth such as Dharmakīrti's.

Nevertheless, while Strawson adopts the sort of constitutive panpsychism detailed by Coleman, it is important to clarify here that neither the arguments against brute emergence nor the arguments against proto-phenomenal qualities entail a commitment to constitutive panpsychism. This is fortunate for the traditional Buddhist insofar as they are able to make use of Strawson's arguments without becoming committed to a view as problematic as constitutive panpsychism.

And constitutive panpsychism is indeed problematic, not just for traditional Buddhist ideas but also on its own terms.

6.5 Phenomenal Qualities and the Combination Problem

Constitutive panpsychism runs into severe problems insofar as it is committed to the view that micro-experiential consciousnesses combine to form a single complex experience and can decompose back into these. Coleman describes the constitution of conscious experiences in terms of 'phenomenal paint', which suggests that there is a fundamental physical entity for every recognisable phenomenal quality within experience. But if this were the case, it would render constitutive panpsychism incompatible with physicalism. This is because there would have to be a wide range of fundamental, intrinsically conscious, phenomenal qualities accounting for each and every distinct property of our ordinary experiences. For example, insofar as the experience of watching a sunset involves an orange-red colour experience there must be particles of orange-redness knocking about within the physical world. Similarly, each distinct sound heard when listening to Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending* would have to originate as a distinct intrinsically conscious sound experience. Likewise, each distinct smell that a sommelier detects in a particular whiff of wine would also arise from an intrinsically conscious micro-experience of smell. And we could go on and on populating the world with micro-experiences for every distinct phenomenal quality that anyone has ever experienced.

To bring such a view together with physicalism would involve the claim that the fundamental physical constituents of reality are *experientially* diverse to an incredible degree despite their *physical* properties being comparably limited. While a human body can be composed using a small range of basic physical particles, properly arranged, human experience would require a vast range of distinct and unique experiential particles. This results in an extreme mismatch between the physical and experiential accounts of human composition. The processes that bring physical constituents together to maintain a living human being do not seem to involve sourcing myriad specialist particles with their own unique phenomenal quality. But these processes would be needed in order to avoid our conscious experiences becoming incoherent when our body runs out of the required micro-experiences. We can imagine a situation where our body runs out of the sounds needed to experience Vaughan Williams' *The Lark*

Ascending and we would instead start hearing someone playing the xylophone because those experiences are still in stock.

In order to avoid such an absurd situation the constitutive panpsychist will need to assume that there is a relatively small set of fundamental phenomenal qualities that account for the variety of conscious experience through their combination into various structures. But this combination cannot simply involve a gathering together of discrete phenomenal "patches" into a picture of the world. If this were the case, our conscious experience would *appear* to be nothing but a collection of very basic phenomenal patches. In order for basic phenomenal qualities to compose complex experience they must be able to completely mix and merge in order to transform into the variety of qualities that we encounter in ordinary conscious experience.

And this is precisely what Strawson assumes.

As an avowed monist, Strawson is committed to the view that there is fundamentally one type of thing, one fundamental physical nature out of which everything arises. For Strawson, once we have accepted that the physical is also experiential we can move forward with the idea of emergence without there being brute qualitative leaps.[14] This is why he is comfortable with the idea that phenomenal qualities like orange-redness might emerge from the fundamental phenomenal qualities of physical nature itself. As physical factors combine and merge to form new physical formations, this would also involve the merging of phenomenal qualities to form new experiences. The orange-red of the sunset would be the result of a particular merging of conscious phenomenally qualitied physical energy in the human body and brain. While this phenomenally qualitied energy would not involve the experience of sounds, smells, tastes, sights, sensations or thoughts, it would have the phenomenal qualities needed to transform into these when structured in the right way.

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[14] See Strawson, 'Realistic Monism', p.72.

However, the suggestion that different sorts of sensory experience can emerge from a common fundamental qualitative experience seems to involve the kind of qualitative leap that panpsychism aims to rule out. Insofar as phenomenal qualities are, by definition, qualitatively different from one another, we must ask how one set of phenomenal qualities is able to emerge from another.

The constitutive panpsychist may be able to answer this question by moving away from the view that physical reality is fundamentally particulate. If each phenomenal quality is a discrete entity or "patch" of experience, the emergence of one set of discrete patches from another set will indeed involve brute qualitative leaps. We will simply be replacing one set of distinct qualities with another. To claim that fundamental experiential factors form up into a complex one would be akin to claiming that if you gather certain sound experiences together in the right way you create a certain visual experience. The argument against brute emergence rules out this sort of thing.

Fortunately for the constitutive panpsychist, the phenomenal qualities that constitute our conscious experiences are not discrete patches. Each phenomenal quality, particularly sensory ones, are completely embedded. Phenomenal colour qualities, for example, are distinctive regions of a visual field, tactile sensations are distinctive regions of a bodily field, while sounds, smells, and tastes are distinctive appearances within auditory, olfactory, and gustatory fields. This thorough embeddedness of phenomenal qualities is something that was recognised by Gestalt theories of consciousness. Gestalt theorist Aron Gurwitsch describes the situation as follows:

> Since data exhibit phenomenal features only derived from the configuration into which they are integrated, it follows that such a configuration cannot be considered as built up out of the 'parts' of which it consists, if these parts are regarded as independent and self-contained elements. More precisely, the configuration cannot be accounted for in terms of these properties and attributes which its constituents display when they are extracted from the actual configuration and are taken isolatedly. The reason is that if a constituent of a configuration is isolated and taken by itself as an independent and self-contained element, it may be affected so radically and by such deep reaching modifications as to destroy its

> phenomenal or experiential identity, the constancy of the external stimuli notwithstanding.[15]

As Gurwitsch makes clear, the very phenomenal identity of a phenomenal property may well be completely destroyed were it to be separated from the field in which it is embedded. Visual and tactile phenomenal properties in particular can only have the phenomenal quality that they do in virtue of the fact that they are part of extended sensory fields. Without a visual field, the phenomenal qualities of colour, shade, and so forth would lack the extension necessary for them to be the distinctively visual experiences that they are. If we return to the example of the specific orange-red of a setting sun, there is nothing about this distinctive orange-red colour that remains if we collapse the visual field because this orange-red colour is part of an extended visual field. If we strip out the visual field, nothing that remains has the visual-experiential phenomenal qualities required to constitute the orange-red sunset.

In this case, when we remove the visual field we completely lose one of the distinctive characteristics that makes the experience of watching a setting sun what it is. We have not reduced phenomenal colour qualities to their constitutive factors, we have simply lost them entirely. This is why it makes sense to conclude that phenomenal colour qualities *are always also* visual field qualities because it is only in virtue of being extended in a visual field that they are the type of phenomenal quality that they are. The same is true for tactile phenomenal qualities, which *are always also* bodily field qualities because it is only in virtue of being extended in a bodily field that they are the type of phenomenal quality that they are. If we examine other sensory phenomenal qualities we will find that the situation is the same: stripped of the field in which they are embedded, these sensory phenomenal qualities disappear without remainder. It is for this reason that the phenomenal qualities that constitute

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[15] Aron Gurwitsch, *Field of Consciousness,* Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1964, p.114.

sensory experience cannot exist in isolation from the sensory field in which they are embedded.

At this point we can recognise that phenomenal qualities are adhering to the Abhidharma Cluster principle. Just as basic characteristics such as solidity are inseparable from spatial extension, so too are sensory phenomenal qualities inseparable from the characteristics that constitute the sensory fields in which they are embedded. Despite seeing the world in terms of unanalysable dharmas, an Abhidharma approach need not necessarily adopt a particulate view of reality or human experience. A world of particles evokes images of separate atoms drifting about in a void. In contrast, a world of dharmas is more like an ocean of interwoven clusters where no single dharma type ever completely separates from the others. And this fluid, as opposed to particulate, view of reality comes closer to how conscious experiences exist.

Therefore, in order for the constitutive panpsychist position to be viable it must approach the physical in terms of fluid phenomena such as fields rather than atomistic phenomena like particles. They could take the view that micro-experiences are not ultimate physical *particles with* phenomenal properties but rather physical *fields of* inseparably embedded physical and phenomenal qualities. The precise nature of the phenomenal qualities would then be dependent upon the characteristics of the field in which they were embedded. Changes in physical-experiential fields would condition and reconfigure the phenomenal qualities of those fields in a gradual way so that there would not be a qualitative leap from one conscious experience to another. In this way, the panpsychist approach to emergence would not involve the kind of brute leap involved in the experiential emerging from the non-experiential.

Furthermore, the emergence of one phenomenal quality from another would be explicable in qualitative terms. Coleman's paint analogy works quite well in this case. If we take phenomenal qualities to be like paints, we can understand how certain basic qualities might merge to form more complex qualities just as blue and yellow paint mixes to form green paint. The merging of different fields would alter their dimensional characteristics and this could determine whether they were, for example, a visual field, an auditory field, or some other type of

experiential field altogether. The idea is that an understanding of the experiential quality of different physical fields would allow us to understand how those fields can merge to form fields with new phenomenal qualities.

For a suggestion as to how this might look, we could recall that Thompson suggests that the electromagnetic field generated by the living cells of the brain might be the key to understanding how conscious experiences are constituted. According to the theories of neuroscientists Roman Bauer and Norman Cook, changes in this dynamic field correlate with changes experienced by conscious subjects, making it possible that the dynamics of this field determine the phenomenal quality of any given conscious experience.[16] The constitutive panpsychist could claim that all such fundamental physical fields involve conscious experiences of the phenomenal qualities that are embedded in the particular structure of the field in question.

Of course, in order for this to work for the constitutive panpsychist, they must be willing to approach the attribution of consciousness in ways that do not involve a commitment to subatomic particles with their own individual consciousness. Luckily, none of Strawson's arguments lead inexorably towards the attribution of consciousness to sub-atomic particles. Nor is it a foregone conclusion that the fundamental constituents of physical reality *are* particles such as protons and neutrons. As Strawson points out, many physicists consider a *field* such as space-time to be the fundamental substance of physical reality.[17] This is why the constitutive panpsychist need not assume that physics is wedded to a particulate view of reality, which enables them to reject any kind of experiential pluralism in which conscious experience is composed of myriads of different types of phenomenally propertied particles. Physical phenomena are far too interchangeable for there to be a vast array of fundamentally distinct

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[16] Thompson, Waking Dreaming Being, 2015, pp.342,343. See Roman Bauer, 'In Search of a Neural Signature of Consciousness – Facts, Hypotheses, and Proposals,' in Synthese, pp.233-245, Vol. 141, 2004. See also N. D. Cook, 'The Neuron Level Phenomena Underlying Cognition and Consciousness: Synaptic Activity and the Action Potential,' in Neuroscience, pp.556-570, Vol. 153, 2008.

[17] Strawson, 'Realistic Monism', p.71.

types of experiential constituent.[18] By dropping a particulate view, constitutive panpsychism can avoid relying on intrinsically distinct particles of experience.

Therefore, in order for constitutive panpsychism to work as a form of physicalism, it must commit to the view that micro-experiences do not simply combine, rather they merge or fuse to form qualitatively distinct but nonetheless explicable formations. It would be through this fusion that extremely simple phenomenal qualities could form into the complex and varied experiences that we enjoy. However, it would also be through fusion that the multiple consciousnesses of each fundamental experiential field would merge into a single consciousness. And, as it turns out, the claim that multiple individual consciousnesses can fuse into a single consciousness generates some serious problems for constitutive panpsychism.

6.6 Conscious Subjects and the Combination Problem

Of all the aspects of panpsychism that Evan Thompson pushes against in *Waking Dreaming Being,* the view that there is an individual consciousness associated with each phenomenal quality and that these combine to form a single ordinary complex consciousness is the most strongly rejected. Thompson thinks that the problems facing the view that particles of conscious experience can 'co-exist or combine coherently into a human or other kind of animal subject' are insurmountable.[19] These insurmountable problems can be used as reasons to reject constitutive panpsychism and are given a clear presentation by Coleman in 'The Real Combination Problem: Panpsychism, Micro-Subjects, and Emergence'.

Unfortunately, Coleman uses these problems in order to justify a view in which subjects, rather than combining, emerge from phenomenal qualities that are

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[18] Galen Strawson, 'Physicalist Panpsychism', *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness,* S. Schneider, and M. Velmans, Wiley, 2017, p.385.
[19] Thompson, *Waking Dreaming Being*, p.105.

devoid of subjective or conscious characteristics. In this way he uses arguments against constitutive panpsychism in order to encourage a return to a view in which consciousness emerges from non-conscious factors.

But nothing about Coleman's argument against constitutive panpsychism actually requires a return to brute emergence because his reasoning regarding the impossibility of subjects combining is very straightforward: The combination of micro-experiences requires that a number of them become configured in such a way that none of the entities cease to exist but rather become modified or 'deformed' versions of themselves as part of the configuration.[20] In the case of phenomenal qualities, we have been able to understand how these qualities are embedded in fields that could merge into more complex fields with more complex phenomenal qualities. A complex field would be a configuration in which the qualities of each constituting field still existed though they would be modified or otherwise transformed in some way.

However, each micro-experience entering into a configuration is a single conscious experience with an individual conscious awareness *of* the experience itself. This awareness *of* the phenomenal quality of the micro-experience is the subject of the micro-experience: the micro-subject. And when individual micro-experiences merge into a single complex experience, the micro-subjects of these micro-experiences must become part of it as well. But insofar as the merging of micro-experiential fields requires that multiple experiences must become one experience, all but one of the micro-subjects must be annihilated.

If we return to the example of the sunset, we can imagine a number of micro-experiential fields, each being an experience for a subject. For simplicity's sake let us imagine that one subject experiences a field of red-orange, another experiences visual roundness, yet another might experience a sense of beauty. These phenomenal qualities might combine to form an experience of a beautiful

[20] Coleman, 'The Real Combination Problem', p.30.

red-orange roundness. In this case the multiple qualities are still present in the combined experience. But the subjects of these experiences have not combined. There is only one subject of the sunset, there is no trace of the multiple subjects that existed before. Before the combination of subjects there are multiple subjects; after the combination of subjects there is only one subject. While the combination of micro-experiences produces a complex configuration of phenomenal qualities in which each quality continues to exist, it also causes the annihilation of conscious subjects. The individual consciousness of any given phenomenal quality does not survive the combination process and so cannot be said to have combined or merged with others at all.

The problem here is that an individual consciousness is, by definition, individual. To speak of *a consciousness* is to speak of a unified point of view *on* the world. If you combine multiple unified points of view all you have is a collection of unified points of view, they have not combined. This was first recognised by William James, whose famous formulation of the problem, presented by Coleman, is as follows:

> Take a hundred [feelings], shuffle them and pack them as close together as you can (whatever that might mean); still each remains the same feeling it always was, shut in its own skin, windowless, ignorant of what the other feelings are and mean.[21]

This is the first half of James' formulation of the problem and captures the way in which an individual consciousness can only be a distinct point of view, it cannot be a collection of points of view.

For there to be consciousness is for there to be something it is like for the consciousness as subject to experience an object, or objects, where this experience is understood as a single appearance of any number of phenomenal qualities. The phrase "something it is like for consciousness" describes something singular: an experience. Consciousness is unified in that it does not

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[21] William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1, New York, Cosimo Inc., 1890, 2007, p.160.

matter how many objects or phenomenal qualities appear within consciousness, they always appear together as part of a single conscious experience. If there are multiple consciousnesses, each of these will involve a single conscious experience, even if diverse qualities or objects are unified within each experience. In order that multiple individual consciousnesses could do more than exist in ignorant co-existence with one another they would have to form into a complex consciousness in which each individual consciousness is still present as an individual consciousness but is also aware of the others. But such a complex consciousness is nothing like ours; ours is a single consciousness insofar as it is a unified appearance or experience and not a complex of multiple individual consciousnesses.

In order to be a true combination, our consciousness must include the multiple consciousnesses of which it is a combination, but a combination of consciousnesses must be a singular conscious experience in order to still be considered consciousness. It is for these reasons that the combination of consciousnesses is not possible. The only way for multiple consciousnesses to come together into a single consciousness is if they all merge, losing their distinct individuality and forming a unified subject. This newly formed consciousness would be more complex than its precursors insofar as it was a complex conscious experience involving multiple phenomenal qualities. But it would be complex in virtue of the combination of phenomenal qualities rather than the combination of consciousnesses.

This is why such a process is not a combination of micro-experiences but rather the *fusion* of micro-experiences in which micro-subjects entirely disappear into a single subject.[22] The counterpart process would be *fission*, in which the singular consciousness of multiple qualities separates and produces multiple consciousnesses, each being conscious of a distinct phenomenal quality. The fusion and fission of consciousness involves the complete appearance and

[22] Coleman, 'The Real Combination Problem', p.37. See also Strawson, 'Realistic Monism', p.71.

disappearance of particular subjects. If we imagine a case in which a single complex subject undergoes fission into three micro-subjects, we can recognise that at least two new subjects must be created. And in order for three micro-subjects to fuse into a single complex subject, at least two of those subjects must disappear. In this case we are assuming that one of the micro-subjects becomes the macro-subject and brings together the phenomenal qualities experienced by the other two. Alternatively we might imagine that all three micro-subjects disappear in giving rise to the macro-subject. In this case the macro-subject is a completely new subject that has appeared as a result of the micro-subjects' "sacrifice".

The intuitive discomfort that we might feel at these possibilities is shared by James in the second half of his formulation of the combination problem:

> There would be a hundred-and-first feeling there, if, when a group or series of such feelings were set up, a consciousness belonging to the group as such should emerge. And this 101st feeling would be a totally new fact; the 100 original feelings might, by a curious physical law, be a signal for its creation, when they came together; but they would have no substantial identity with it, nor it with them, and one could never deduce the one from the others, or (in any intelligible sense) say that they evolved it.[23]

In Coleman's interpretation, he clarifies that the 101st feeling that James mentions is the macro-subject of the newly complex experience. This macro-subject would indeed be 'a totally new fact' unless it was nothing other than a micro-subject that had survived the fusion process and inherited the phenomenal qualities of the other micro-subjects, which *had* been annihilated during fusion.

Whether the macro-subject is totally new or the sole survivor of fusion, the creation and annihilation of subjects is involved in fusion and fission. In the case of fusion, we can avoid positing an instance of creation if we assume that a micro-subject became the macro-subject by absorbing and destroying the other

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[23] James, *The Principles of Psychology*, p.160.

micro-subjects. In the case of fission, we can avoid positing the annihilation of the macro-subject if it becomes a micro-subject whilst creating other micro-subjects. But to fully avoid either creation or annihilation we would have to remove either fusion or fission from the picture. To do either would be to posit an unstable reality in which the overall number of subjects was either ever-shrinking or ever-growing *ad infinitum*. Therefore, as long as fusion *and* fission are part of our metaphysical approach to consciousness, we will be assuming both the creation and annihilation of individual consciousnesses or subjects.

Insofar as constitutive panpsychism implies the creation and annihilation of individual consciousnesses, it relies on an appeal, not to brute *emergence*, but to brute *causation*. In order to see why this is the case we must first remind ourselves that all events must have preceding homogeneous causes, causes which determine the distinctive characteristics of an event by *becoming* the constitutive factors of that event. If this preceding cause did not *become* a constitutive factor, it would have nothing to do with the intrinsic nature of the phenomenon in question. This is the problem that the constitutive panpsychist is faced with.

To return to a prior example, a marble boulder can only be a preceding homogeneous cause of a marble statue if some of its material has gone into constituting the statue. Likewise, a particular preceding consciousness can only be a homogeneous cause of the intrinsic qualities of a succeeding consciousness if some of the former's characteristics go into constituting the latter. But when multiple micro-experiential phenomenal qualities combine into a single complex conscious experience, only one micro-experiential consciousness can be the homogeneous cause of the complex consciousness. This is because the complex consciousness, which involves a single subject, only has the characteristics of a single consciousness. If there were more than one consciousness as homogeneous causes, the complex conscious experience would have to involve more than one consciousness. But a single conscious experience is, by definition, the experience of a single instance of consciousness and so cannot have more than one instance of consciousness as a preceding homogeneous cause.

This means that fusion would involve the complete annihilation of an individual consciousness. The annihilated consciousness would have quite literally *become* nothing just as the surviving consciousness would have *become* the consciousness of the macro-experience. This amounts to brute causation because there will have been a complete and inexplicable transformation of a phenomenon, which has particular characteristics, into nothing at all, which also has particular characteristics, albeit negative ones. Of course, we might deny that it is possible to *become* nothing, in which case we have simply recognised that it is probably not possible to fall out of existence. If existence is not a place you can fall out of, and nothingness is not something you can become, it seems equally likely that annihilation is not something that can actually happen.

Nonetheless, even if fusion does not involve brute causation in an obvious way, fission certainly does. Any phenomenon that does not have any preceding homogeneous causes must have constitutive homogeneous causes that appeared out of nowhere. If a marble statue has no preceding homogeneous causes, it must be made of material that popped into existence when the statue did. Likewise, a particular consciousness without a preceding consciousness as homogeneous cause must be constituted by factors that appeared out of nowhere.

Let us take the case of a single complex conscious experience that decomposes into multiple micro-experiential phenomenal qualities, each with their own individual consciousness. In this case, the individual consciousness of the complex experience can only be the preceding homogeneous cause of *one* of the subsequent micro-experiential consciousnesses. This is because a preceding homogeneous cause must *become* a constitutive factor of its effect. The preceding homogeneous causes of a micro-experiential consciousness must include those factors that account for its character as a singular conscious perspective. Those preceding homogeneous causes must *become* constitutive factors in the micro-experiential consciousness just as the marble of the boulder *becomes* the marble of the statue. In this way, the singular conscious perspectival character of a micro-experiential consciousness is *transferred to it* from a preceding factor that *becomes* this character. But this transfer involves

the preceding homogeneous cause disappearing into its effect. Such a transfer can only happen once because the homogeneous cause in question no longer exists once it has disappeared into its effect. This is what it means for the singular conscious perspectival character of the complex conscious experience to *become* the same character in the micro-subject.

Although a single macro-subject can *become* a single micro-subject, both sharing the same characteristic of individual consciousness, the *single* macro-subject lacks the characteristics to become *multiple* micro-subjects. This is why a macro-experiential consciousness can only produce a single micro-experiential consciousness as successor, any other micro-experiential consciousnesses would appear via brute causation. And if we accept that brute causation is possible, the world cannot be intelligible. We must reject the possibility of brute causation in order to make sense of the world. Every phenomenon must have preceding homogeneous causes, which *become* its constitutive aspects. Likewise, no phenomenon can simply turn into nothing at all.

Therefore, the constitutive panpsychist cannot offer an intelligible account of the world if they take the view that multiple conscious subjects can fuse into an individual conscious subject or that an individual subject can fissure into multiple subjects. At this point Strawson's constitutive panpsychism falls apart insofar as micro-experiences must fuse in order to form complex macro-experiences. If each micro-experience has its own subject and the fusion and fission of subjects is not possible, the fusion and fission of micro-experiences is not possible. This means that the fusion and fission of phenomenal qualities is not possible. The merging and fusion of phenomenal qualities into interesting, new, and complex phenomenal experiences cannot mirror the merging and fusion of physical formations if micro-experiences cannot fuse.

This also rules out any theory in which an individual conscious subject is taken to result from fusion or fission. Any constitutive approach to consciousness in which many consciousnesses become one will rely on the brute causation that

comes with fusion and fission. It also rules out any theory in which one consciousness emerges from another.[24]

To summarise, in order for the fundamental constituents of conscious experience to be physical constituents, the experiential features of these constituents must be able to mirror the processes undergone by their physical features. Most importantly, fundamental physical phenomena are interchangeable because basic physical factors can combine to form into the full range of physical phenomena. In order for experiential factors to mirror this, there must be basic experiential qualities that can form up into the full range of possible experiences. These basic experiential qualities must be able to combine coherently into the complex and vast array of phenomenally qualitied experiences that are involved in conscious experience. The variety of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, sensations, and thoughts that are involved in conscious experiences require more than a mere combination or organisational structuring. In order for basic phenomenal qualities to form everything from sights to smells to thoughts they will need to be able to completely merge and transform their phenomenal quality.

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[24] Any form of theism in which an individual consciousness separates from a universal consciousness and can merge back into it is also ruled out here. Such theories also involve fission and fusion, it is just that their explanation for the arising of an individual consciousness works in the opposite direction. Rather than taking the fundamental constituents of reality to merge into a conscious organism, these theories take there to be a fundamentally unified reality that separates into conscious organisms. Regardless, the creation of a new subject involves brute causation just as the final merging with the universal mind would involve annihilation. The Indian philosophical school that comes closest to such a view would be Advaita-Vedānta. However, rather than positing a universal Self that separates into distinct selves, the Advaita-Vedānta argues that there is indeed only one universal consciousness, Brahman, but that it can 'appear' (māyā) to be multiple in the form of individual selves (jīvātman) while remaining ontologically one. Such a response trades off on the suggestion that each of us can *appear* to be having our own individuated experiences when in fact there is *really* a single universal consciousness having all of these experiences together. But, as mentioned earlier, the reality of a conscious experience is precisely how it appears. So the appearance of a particular experience to a discrete subject is completely different from the appearance of that particular experience to a vast cosmic subject, a subject that is also aware of the experiences of all beings. The two appearances are so different that one cannot be the true reality of the other. See Roy W. Perrett, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp.177-180.

But the complete merging of micro-experiences results in the annihilation of conscious micro-subjects just as the separation of such micro-experiences results in the creation of micro-subjects. While phenomenal qualities may well be embedded in fields that can merge into one another, forming more complex phenomenal qualities, individual consciousnesses cannot merge in this way. Consciousness is the unified phenomenal perspective from which certain objects and phenomenal qualities appear. It is a single point of view on objects and qualities. To move from there being multiple instances of phenomenal consciousness to a single instance is simply to have removed all but one instance of phenomenal consciousness. This is a distinctive characteristic of phenomenal consciousness.

Insofar as the panpsychist claims that all physical phenomena are conscious phenomena, they cannot also claim that physical phenomena can merge to form new complex phenomena. If each constituent of physical reality has its own consciousness, physical constituents cannot merge. This rules out an approach to physical reality in which it is fundamentally composed of fields that merge together to form more complex fields. Insofar as the constitutive panpsychist maintains that the constituents of physical reality have their own individual consciousness, they are in fact wedded to a particulate view of physical reality. This, in turn, rules out the kind of emergence that Strawson relies on. Complex phenomenal qualities cannot emerge from more basic ones if the basic constituents of experience cannot merge or fuse into new experiences.

Therefore, in being committed to the idea that every physical constituent has its own individual consciousness, the constitutive panpsychist is thrown back onto the idea that every distinct phenomenal quality in conscious experience, every sound, smell, colour, thought, and so on *and on* must belong to a distinct constituent of reality. This entails an extreme mismatch between the physical and experiential accounts of human composition. While a human body can be composed out of a small set of basic physical constituents, properly arranged, human experience would require a vast range of distinct and unique experiential constituents.

As mentioned above, to hear *The Lark Ascending* would require that certain phenomenally qualitied sound particles were gathered to produce this experience. There would have to be specialist physical constituents and specialist physical processes that gather these constituents in order to compose the appropriate conscious experiences at the correct times. These constituents would not be currently known physical constituents because they would not arrive in the body via the normal processes. The processes that gather the phenomenal qualities of listening to music, watching sunsets, or smelling grass would be additional to the known biological processes that manage and metabolize ordinary physical constituents.

Furthermore, the constitutive panpsychist would have to posit specialist processes to explain how intrinsically conscious physical constituents are able to experience each other's phenomenal qualities in such a way that this joint experience was more than simply a collection of discrete phenomenal qualities. Without being able to merge into a single subject, each micro-subject must somehow experience the phenomenal qualities of every other. The micro-subject for any colour in my visual field must be able to experience the colour in every other part of my field for the whole visual experience to be possible. In this case, each micro-subject must have the capacity to become aware of phenomenal qualities aside from its own.

However, once the constitutive panpsychist is entertaining the possibility that a single micro-subject can experience different phenomenal qualities at different times, they have abandoned the idea that each phenomenally qualitied constituent of reality has *its own* micro-subject. If conscious micro-subjects can become aware of more than just their own phenomenal quality, they are no longer the intrinsic consciousness of a particular physical constituent.

6.7 Conclusion: Reconsidering Proto-Phenomenal Qualities

At this point it may have become unclear why anyone would even assume that any micro-subject is intrinsically linked with any phenomenal quality. The answer, if we recall, is that the constitutive panpsychist posits intrinsically

conscious phenomenally qualitied physical constituents in order to explain what happens to phenomenal qualities when they are not part of a complex conscious experience such as our own. Insofar as phenomenal qualities are distinctive conscious appearances, they cannot be *phenomenal* qualities if there is no consciousness *of* them. And without this phenomenal character, the distinctive nature of phenomenal qualities disappears completely. The phenomenal qualities that make hearing violin music or smelling grass what they are disappear without remainder without phenomenal awareness. Everything about what it is like to hear violin music or smell grass is an appearance within conscious experience. These phenomenal qualities must arise from preceding factors that can explain their phenomenal quality and non-conscious factors could not have the required phenomenal qualities.

However, our exploration of constitutive panpsychism has also made it clear that phenomenal qualities are not separable particles of conscious experience. We have reasons to doubt that "what it is like" to smell grass or hear violin music is composed of particles of experience that can exist on their own. Each phenomenal quality, whether it is the orange-red of a setting sun, a particular note in *The Lark Ascending,* or the particular smell of grass on a particular summer's day, is embedded within a wider sensory field. This means that the experience of listening to the violin solo in *The Lark Ascending* is not to be accounted for in terms of independent phenomenal qualities that come together to form the experience. The phenomenal qualities of the music are embedded in the auditory field and can only exist as the qualities that they are in virtue of this sensory field.

Furthermore, the sheer variety of discrete phenomenal qualities that would be required in order to account for every single phenomenal quality would render constitutive panpsychism completely incompatible with a physicalist account of conscious experience. This was why Strawson opted for an experiential emergentist view in which the vast variety of phenomenal qualities in our experiences arise from the merging of more basic phenomenal qualities. In this way, the micro-experiences that constitute our experiences must be able to merge to form a coherent field of experience. But, insofar as the constituents of

phenomenally qualitied experience must merge with one another to produce other distinctive experiences, they cannot have their own intrinsic consciousness. As we have already seen, individual conscious subjects cannot merge, which is why the problems facing the constitutive panpsychist solution are, as Thompson and Coleman claim, insurmountable.

Nevertheless, the failures of constitutive panpsychism do not undermine its arguments against brute emergence, nor do they make the problems with unexperienced phenomenal qualities any less severe. The continued existence of phenomenal qualities depends on there being at least one consciousness that experiences them at any given time. And if phenomenal qualities are an intrinsic feature of physical "stuff", as the panpsychist argues, phenomenal qualities must be as capable of merging and transforming as the physical "stuff" that they are a feature of. But because conscious subjects cannot merge, in order for any set of phenomenal qualities to be able to merge they must already *share* a single conscious subject. Therefore, every phenomenal quality that is capable of merging with another must already be appearing to a subject along with every other phenomenal quality with which it could ever merge.

Ultimately, if the panpsychist is going to remain committed to the view that the complex phenomenal qualities that we experience are ultimately physical, they will need to adopt a view in which the whole of the phenomenally qualitied physical universe is maintained by a single conscious subject. This is firstly because, if complex phenomenal experiences are physical, they must be the result of the fusion and fission of more basic phenomenally qualitied physical factors. But, secondly, these phenomenally qualitied physical factors can only freely fissure and fuse to become more complex if these processes do not involve the fission and fusion of conscious subjects. As we have seen, such fission and fusion is highly problematic.

However, there must be a subject that experiences a phenomenally qualitied physical factor even as it undergoes fusion and fission. Such physical factors cannot remain *phenomenally* qualitied if there is no consciousness *of* them when they are merging to form complex phenomena. What is required is a *single* subject that constantly experiences phenomenally qualitied physical

factors, even when they fuse and fissure. The fusion and fission of subjects does not need to happen if all such processes take place within a *single* all-encompassing consciousness.

Therefore, in order for there to be basic physical phenomenal qualities that can merge and form into complex experiences, there must be a single all-encompassing conscious experience in which the phenomenally qualitied aspect of physical energy maintains its *phenomenal* quality. Ultimately, such a version of panpsychism might be indistinguishable from metaphysical idealism. If the all-encompassing conscious experience is not ours within this adapted version of panpsychism, our conscious experience would not be involved in any processes of fission and fusion. Rather, our conscious experience would be an awareness *of* the phenomenally qualitied physical universe, which would be maintained in its entirety by an all-encompassing consciousness that is distinct from our own. This approach would lend itself to a theistic interpretation, such as Bishop George Berkeley's, in which God preserves the whole of reality in his own mind and we simply experience the mind of God.[25] Alternatively, an adapted version of panpsychism might posit an all-encompassing but subtle level of consciousness that is connected to our own, much like the storehouse consciousness within the Yogācāra school of Buddhism, in which phenomenal qualities are preserved.[26]

Regardless of the idealist possibilities, such an adapted version of panpsychism would be consistent with Dharmakīrti's approach to consciousness and rebirth. Insofar as the fusion, fission, annihilation and brute creation of conscious subjects has been thoroughly ruled out, the subject of each conscious experience would arise in dependence upon a single prior conscious subject. With each singular conscious subject giving rise to or "becoming" another with

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[25] Robinson, 'Idealism', 2009. Alternatively, this version of panpsychism might be comparable to some variants within the Vedānta school of Indian Philosophy. See Perrett, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, 2016, pp.210-220.

[26] See Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp.248,249. In Chapter Eight, particularly section 8.5, arguments will be made that suggest ways in which our own conscious experience might in fact be all-encompassing in certain ways.

each new instance of conscious experience, there would be an unbroken continuum of individual conscious subjects. Such an unbroken continuum would persist regardless of bodily death and, assuming that our own birth was not an absurdly unique occurrence, must be capable of being recurrently born with other physical bodies.

However, insofar as a commitment to intrinsically conscious *physical* phenomenal qualities pushes the panpsychist towards metaphysical idealism, many would be tempted to abandon their attempt at a physicalist account of phenomenal qualities. But this would not avoid the problem that partly motivates both panpsychism and idealism: what happens to the particular phenomenal qualities of an experienced object when there is no longer any individual awareness of those qualities?

To avoid idealism, one would need to posit phenomenal qualities that can exist separately from a consciousness of them. This would involve positing some kind of *proto*-phenomenal qualities. In this case, phenomenal qualities would ultimately be *non*-experiential qualities that have somehow become "illuminated" by a process which makes them phenomenally conscious and therefore *phenomenally* qualitied. There would not be an individual consciousness for every quality that shows up in conscious experience. Instead, phenomenal qualities would arise from a universe of non-conscious qualities and a phenomenal consciousness to which they can appear. This would be the kind of Russellian Monist approach explored in the last chapter. The particular qualities that make listening to violin music, watching the sunset, or smelling grass what they are would be distinctive formations of non-conscious qualities that have simply been apprehended by consciousness and thus *become* phenomenal qualities.

And yet, even if idealism is avoided in this way, phenomenal consciousness remains a distinctive factor that must have preceding causes capable of giving rise to it. In this kind of Russellian Monist reality, phenomenal consciousness would be the process in virtue of which the qualities that are intrinsic to the fabric of the universe are transformed into full-blown phenomenal qualities. Such a process would have, as part of its intrinsic nature, the capacity to

illuminate the qualities of reality. Such an illuminating characteristic would be the intrinsic characteristic that defines this process of “quality illumination”. Unless this “quality illumination process” arises from factors that are devoid of any characteristic that involves “illuminating the qualities of the world”, we will be left with conscious illumination as a fundamental feature of reality. As a fundamental feature of reality, a single instance of conscious illumination would only be able to arise as the result of a preceding instance of conscious illumination.

Furthermore, as we have already seen, an instance of conscious illumination involves an individual conscious subject. This means that, if conscious illumination cannot be reduced to further factors, the conscious subject of our experiences must arise from a single preceding conscious subject. There would, therefore, be an unbroken series of instances of conscious illumination. In this case we have a form of dualism akin to Dharmakīrti’s. Even if we adopted an Idealist approach, the fact that a conscious subject cannot split off from another means that there would also have to be an unbroken series of instances of consciousness in this case. The only way to avoid Dharmakīrti’s conclusion that each instance of consciousness is part of a beginningless and endless stream is to take the distinctive characteristics of phenomenal consciousness and show how they can be decomposed into unconscious factors. In the following chapters we shall see why this is not possible.

7. The Unbroken Continuity of Individual Consciousness

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, we have found some good reasons for accepting the second premise of Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth: conscious mental events cannot arise from factors that are completely devoid of the distinctive characteristics of consciousness. This is because a conscious event, like any other phenomenon, must have homogeneous causes. The homogeneous causes of an event are those factors that give the event its distinctive qualities by, in a sense, *becoming* the constitutive factors of the event. At no point in the causal process can unprecedented types of factor appear as if by magic. Every factor must have precedents in virtue of which it is the type of thing that it is. When applied to conscious phenomena, this approach to causation entails that the distinctive qualities of such phenomena must be traceable back to their constitutive factors and these constituents must have existed in a preceding form. For every distinctive quality found within conscious experience there must be adequate preceding factors to explain why that quality is precisely what it is.

Furthermore, we have seen that, insofar as any phenomenon can be analysed into distinct factors, its reality depends upon those more fundamental factors coming together in a certain way. The complex phenomenon cannot have any reality over and above the reality of its constituents insofar as those constituent factors are precisely what make the complex phenomenon what it is. But this does not mean that the constituent factors of every complex phenomenon are separable. Even if a phenomenon can be analysed into its constituents, it may also be the case that none of these constituents can exist in isolation from the others. These constituents would, together, be an indivisible cluster. Such clusters are complex phenomena that would be impossible if each constituent were not always combined with the others.

In this chapter, we will continue to explore reasons for believing that the core conditions for conscious experience form an indivisible cluster. In particular, these core conditions will be shown to consist of an individual instance of

phenomenally conscious apprehension, anticipation, retention, and immediate recollection of objects embedded within a temporal structure. It will be argued that every instance of phenomenally conscious experience requires these factors and that the separation of any one of them from the others not only makes phenomenal consciousness impossible but also makes every remaining factor incapable of accounting for the particular characteristics found in conscious experience. In this case, the division of a consciousness cluster would preclude any possibility of phenomenal consciousness ever existing. This is why we must assume that, for every instance of phenomenal consciousness, there is a cluster of factors that have never, in the history of reality, arisen in isolation from one another. This justifies believing that any instance of conscious experience involves an indivisible consciousness cluster and that this instance is part of an unbroken stream of such instances. Such a stream would continue even through physical death.

7.2 The Temporal Embeddedness of Phenomenal Qualities

In the previous chapter we explored the possibility of separating conscious experiences into their constituent phenomenal qualities. This was the route taken by the constitutive panpsychist and allowed for the possibility that conscious experience is unceasing and yet is still something that decomposes at death, albeit into constituent conscious entities. During this exploration it became clear that phenomenal qualities are not separable particles of experience. We have reasons to doubt that we can parcel out “what it is like” to smell grass or hear violin music into discrete qualities that could then be put back together into a different experience. This is because each phenomenal quality, whether it is the orange-red of a setting sun, a particular note in *The Lark Ascending,* or the particular smell of grass on a particular summer’s day, is embedded within a wider sensory field. The experience of listening to the violin solo in *The Lark Ascending* is not simply a collection of independent phenomenal qualities, they are embedded in the auditory field and only exist as the qualities that they are in virtue of this sensory field.

But auditory experiences such as listening to music are not only embedded in the auditory field, they are also embedded within a temporal structure that is a necessary feature of phenomenally conscious experience.

For example, an auditory experience such as listening to music is not possible without at least a minimal experience of time. Whilst the experience of an entire song is clearly a temporally unfolding phenomenon, even a single beat of such a song is temporal. Such a beat is heard as happening, occurring or unfolding over time, no matter how briefly it sounds. A similar situation holds true for sensations, which elapse over time, no matter how brief. Sensations are generally vibrating, pulsing, throbbing things that are experienced as temporal. These temporal phenomena are experienced as flowing from one state to another without gaps or breaks. They appear within conscious experience as an unbroken flow of events. Even if we were to imagine that our conscious experience of sounds, sensations, urges and thoughts were simply a series of discrete, inert experiences, there would still need to be a single experience that brought each experience in the series together.[1] When listening to *The Lark Ascending,* for example, I cannot hear a single note without this experience already involving multiple phases of that particular note as one conscious experience.

This feature of conscious experience was famously investigated by Edmund Husserl in his lectures on the phenomenology of internal time consciousness. He recognised that the flow of experiences requires that conscious experience has a temporal structure in virtue of which each experiential event is embedded so as to appear *as* flowing. This temporal structure is an undeniable aspect of conscious experience. With regard to listening to a melody, Husserl himself

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[1] This argument regarding the temporal nature of experience was made by Immanuel Kant but, as we shall now see, was further developed by Edmund Husserl. See, for example, passages A103 and A104 in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. Norman Kemp Smith, Basingstoke, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2007, pp.133, 134. See also Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, trans. J. S. Churchill, Indiana University Press, 1964, and *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic,* trans. A. J. Steinbock, Dortrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001.

puts it as follows: 'The evidence that consciousness of a tonal process, a melody, exhibits a succession even as I hear it is such as to make every doubt or denial appear senseless.'[2] In order for one sound in the melody to appear *as* earlier than another, there must be at least a minimal awareness of a succession of sound events, one following another. Without this temporal awareness, it would not be possible to experience even a single phase of a note of music because even the briefest phase involves the present becoming the past. A sound experience *is* an experience of the present flowing into the past, which means that without the ability to experience events *as* flowing into the past, the experience of listening to *The Lark Ascending* is impossible.

Even the briefest of sound experiences appears as something flowing into the past and giving way to more sound experience. This requires that different temporal phases, from present to immediate past, are experienced together so that the sound can appear as flowing from one to the other. In this way, a dynamic conscious experience, such as a sound, involves an experience of every temporal phase from the immediate past to an anticipated immediate future. This gives the experiential present what we can call a 'temporal thickness' insofar as it extends through these temporal phases.[3]

Any dynamic experience, whether it is a sound, a bodily sensation, visual movement, an urge, or an unfolding thought, cannot be possible without temporal awareness. The very appearance of a sound, a sensation, an urge, a moving vision, or an unfolding thought, is the appearance of something moving through time. And this movement through time is experienced as the receding of moments into the past. Husserl describes this movement in the case of sound as follows:

> The same sound which is heard now is, from the point of view of the flux of consciousness which follows it, past, its duration expired. To my consciousness, points of temporal duration recede, as points of

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[2] Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, trans. J. S. Churchill, Indiana University Press, 1964, p.23.

[3] Ralph Pred, *Onflow: Dynamics of Consciousness and Experience,* MIT Press, 2005, p.77.

> a stationary object in space recede when I "go away from the object." The object retains its place; even so does the sound retain its time. Its temporal point is unmoved, but the sound vanishes into the remoteness of consciousness; the distance from the generative now becomes ever greater. The sound itself is the same, but "in the way that" it appears, the sound is continually different.[4]

In this way, the precise object that was experienced during a past moment is retained within experience but as something that belongs to a past time. But the past time to which a past object belongs is always receding from us and we are aware of this recession as a feature of every conscious experience.

Furthermore, the temporal thickness of our experience does not only include the retention of previous present objects. Even before we hear, feel, see, or otherwise sense a particular object we have already anticipated the range of ways in which it might be perceived. As Husserl describes it:

> [T]he perception has horizons made up of other possibilities of perception, as perceptions that we *could* have, if we *actively directed* the course of perception otherwise: if, for example, we turned our eyes that way instead of this, or if we were to step forward or to one side, and so forth.[5]

So, for example, before we actually hear the next tone in a melody such as *The Lark Ascending* we have already anticipated the ways in which we might perceive it. We know that if we move our head this way or that the sound will appear to us in this or that modified way. What we might think of as a particular sound 'impression' does not even appear to us as a single instant but rather as the realisation of an already anticipated possibility.[6] Such possibilities are already anticipated as dynamic, unfolding experiences which, as they are realised, arise into the present from the horizon of possibilities and then on into the retained past. And even the anticipated possibilities are retained. Using the example of a visible object, Husserl presents it as follows:

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[4] Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, p.45.
[5] Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1960, p.44.
[6] Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, p.51.

> In the corresponding memory this recurs in modified form, perhaps in the consciousness that, instead of the sides then visible in fact, I could have seen others – naturally, if I had directed my perceptual activity in a suitably different manner.[7]

The immediately retained past includes not just how an object *actually* appeared within experience but also the ways that it could *possibly* have appeared under different circumstances. This adds an additional complexity to the temporal thickness of experience.

Accordingly, in order for temporally extended experiences to appear as they do within consciousness, they must be embedded within an awareness of temporal periods stretching from the retained receding past to the anticipated future through the present and its possibilities. Without this temporal awareness there cannot be sounds, sensations, and so on, as conscious experiences. Whatever might remain were this temporal awareness removed would have none of the phenomenal qualities of sounds, sensations, and so on. Such phenomenal qualities are firmly embedded within dynamic experiences of unfolding time.

Ultimately, there is nothing that it is like to listen to birdsong or have an itchy leg outside of the temporal structure in which these experiences are embedded. It is not possible for the particular phenomenal qualities of a dynamic experience to exist in isolation from the awareness of unfolding time that makes them the dynamic experiences that they are. This is a case where stripping out temporal awareness also strips out the distinctive phenomenal qualities of every dynamic experience from sounds, to sensations, to urges, and so on. A sound cannot be separated from the temporal awareness in virtue of which the different phases of the sound appear *as* flowing from one temporal phase to another. This is why we can conclude that the phenomenal qualities of dynamic experiences such as listening to *The Lark Ascending* are completely embedded in a temporal structure with its in-built awareness of time.

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[7] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p.44.

7.3 Phenomenal Consciousness and Its Inseparable Temporal Structure

In order for conscious experience to come to an end at death, the fundamental factors that constitute and give rise to it must be non-conscious factors. As we have seen in previous chapters, this requires that the distinctive features of conscious experience can be traced back smoothly to non-conscious factors. In order for this tracing back to be intelligible, the distinctive features of conscious experience must not completely disappear but rather must reduce smoothly.

As we have just seen, there are reasons to believe that none of the phenomenal qualities of a dynamic experience such as listening to music would survive if separated from the temporal structure in virtue of which a sound can appear *as* a flowing experience. In order to trace these phenomenal qualities back to non-conscious factors, we cannot simply separate them from the temporal structure. Without this structure, dynamic experiences and the qualities that they consist of completely disappear. And this difficulty separating phenomenal qualities from the temporal structure of consciousness is mirrored in the difficulty we have in separating phenomenal qualities from consciousness itself.

As was discussed in the fourth section of the previous chapter, phenomenal consciousness is required in order for the phenomenal qualities of experienced sounds, colours, sensations, and so on, to be *phenomenal* qualities. Being *phenomenal,* such qualities, properties, or features are those that *appear* within conscious awareness. It is precisely *what it is like for them to appear as conscious experiences* that makes the phenomenal qualities of sounds, colours, sensations, and so on *what they are*.

Being equally phenomenal, the phenomenal qualities of *dynamic* experiences require a phenomenal awareness or consciousness in virtue of which a sound, sensation or another dynamic experience appears *as* a conscious experience. The auditory, bodily, and emotional experiences involved in listening to *The Lark Ascending* are dynamic *conscious* experiences. These phenomenally qualitied experiences are *what it is like* to listen to *The Lark Ascending.*

Unconscious versions of these experiences would lack the qualitative characteristics that make phenomenal qualities what they are. And insofar as phenomenal qualities can only exist as appearances to phenomenal awareness, we might question whether it is possible to trace such qualities back to factors that exist independently of such awareness.

Nevertheless, it does seem plausible to take the qualities that constitute what it is like to experience something like birdsong, for example, and trace them back to factors that are not necessarily appearances to consciousness. Prior to consciousness, there could be proto-phenomenal qualities, qualities which constitute everything that an experience like birdsong *sounds like* without these qualities necessarily existing *only for a given consciousness.* As we have seen previously, there are problems with treating phenomenal qualities this way. The phenomenal qualities of sounds, sights, smells, and so on, are precisely the quality *of* their appearance to consciousness. But to reject proto-phenomenal qualities out of hand would beg the question in favour of conscious experience being a fundamental and unceasing feature of reality.

However, separating conscious experience into phenomenal consciousness and the proto-phenomenal qualities that consciousness is *of* requires that consciousness is capable of reaching beyond itself and into the nature of other things in the world. This is what it means to say that consciousness involves intentionality, it is directed beyond itself.[8] If the qualities that make a particular sound, sight, smell, taste, sensation, or thought *what it is like* are qualities of things-in-the-world, consciousness must be the factor that turns these things-in-the-world into conscious experiences. In this case consciousness becomes a distinct factor capable of "illuminating" objects and transforming dull potentials for experience into full-blown conscious experiences.[9] Such a distinct factor would have to be traced smoothly back to preceding factors with the

[8] Dan Arnold, *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing,* New York, Columbia University Press, 2012*,* p.7.

[9] Evan Thompson, *Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy*, Columbia University Press, 2015, pp.14, 82.

characteristics necessary to explain and account for this “illuminating” power. These factors must *become* said illuminating power and so cannot simply be dull potentials themselves.

Furthermore, as we have just seen, there must be a temporal structure in virtue of which dynamic experiences can have any of their defining phenomenal qualities. While the proto-phenomenal qualities of sounds and such-like could exist without there necessarily being a consciousness that they appear to, these proto-phenomenal qualities could not exist without the temporal structure that makes these the qualities capable of constituting *dynamic* experiences. This means that the proto-phenomenal qualities of sounds and the like cannot be separated from a temporal structure. Rather, the temporal structure must play a *constitutive* role in making the phenomenal qualities of dynamic experiences what they are.[10] Without this temporal structure the phenomenal qualities of music, birdsong, itchiness, and so forth would not be possible.

If phenomenal consciousness involves an inseparable temporal structure, in virtue of which it both illuminates and temporally structures the objects of its experience, this would offer further reason to believe that phenomenal consciousness cannot be smoothly reduced to non-conscious factors. Insofar as phenomenal consciousness would not only apprehend or illuminate but also *constitute* the very nature of the objects and qualities that appear to it, any attempt to explain the origins of conscious experience would struggle to find preceding factors that could smoothly develop into such an *intrinsically* complex phenomenon. To avoid such an inflated view of consciousness, one would have to separate phenomenal consciousness from the temporal structure that constitutes the phenomenal qualities of most, and perhaps all, of our conscious experience.

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[10] See Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time.* See also Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science*. Routledge, 2008.

However, the phenomenal qualities of dynamic experiences, those which involve sounds, bodily sensations, moving visual objects, urges, and so forth are embedded in a temporal structure. In order to separate this structure from phenomenal awareness, it must be possible for there to be proto-phenomenal qualities that are temporally structured even if there is no phenomenal awareness of them. If this were the case, phenomenal awareness would be an awareness of a separate temporal structure in which dynamic experiences, and their proto-phenomenal qualities, were embedded. But in this case we must account for the fact that dynamic objects such as sounds and the like are experienced as constantly flowing into the past. Every dynamic experience is embedded in a "thick" present in which the immediate present is always already disappearing into the immediate past only to be replaced by a new immediate present, which is also already disappearing into the immediate past. To say that the present is "always already" disappearing into the immediate past is to say that we do not experience a break, gap, pause, or interruption between the presently occurring and that which has just passed. Within the flow of conscious experience the end of one event is the beginning of another. For this reason, where objects such as sounds are experienced as a series of flowing events, the distinction between the remembered and presently apprehended is not a clear one.

In this way, dynamic conscious experiences exemplify what Ralph Pred calls 'Onflow' in his book of the same name.[11] One experience flows into the next, which flows into the next, without any apparent break. The experience of listening to *The Lark Ascending* while hiking, for example, is a stream of phenomenal qualities. The very fact that these qualities flow from one to the next defines the conscious experience insofar as conscious experience is "what it is like" to listen to a particular song while walking. But as the conscious experience unfolds, it brings different types of experience at different times. A walk on the hills might flow into a picnic on the hills, which flows on to other

[11] Pred, *Onflow*, p.21.

experiences. This flow of experience is likewise a flow from one set of phenomenal qualities to another. These phenomenal qualities and the objects of experience in general are always embedded in the temporal *onflow* of conscious experience. We cannot speak accurately of *a* dynamic experience as if it could be analysed into static moments of conscious experience, each with their own phenomenal qualities. The phenomenal qualities of a dynamic experience are only the qualities that they are because they are always already flowing from one to the next.

In this way there is nothing "gappy" about the experience of hiking or listening to music. We do not experience a series of completely discrete notes or hiking-moments because each sound, sight, or sensation flows unbroken into the next. If there were a gap in which experience completely stopped, this gap would not be part of the experience because such a gap would not appear *within* experience. Even if, whilst hiking, we *were* to experience a gap in which the hiking experience was briefly replaced by complete disembodied darkness, this would simply be another, very strange, experience. This strange experience itself would not be "gappy" because it would be embedded within a gapless temporal onflow in which hiking flows into darkness, which flows into hiking again.

Nevertheless, there are situations where experiences appear to jump incongruously from one event to a much later event without any obvious intervening experiences. For example, someone might lie down in the afternoon to listen to an entire album of music but, after what seems like mere moments, notice that the album has finished and that it is early morning. Our experience of time can involve jumps in which long stretches seem to disappear, whether through falling rapidly into a deep sleep, undergoing general anaesthetic or suffering from an unusual physiological or neurological condition.[12] But in these cases the flow of time *as experienced* is not interrupted. If anything we could

[12] For more on the pathologies that can affect temporal experience see Shaun Gallagher, 'Pathologies in Narrative Structures', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement,* Vol. 60, May 2007, pp.203-224.

say that the flow of time is *experienced* as having rapidly sped up. In our example the afternoon has flowed so rapidly into the following morning that there is no recollection of anything in between.

Admittedly, here there is something of a gap insofar as there are missing events that would normally have been experienced during the intervening time between the afternoon and morning. But failure to apprehend the passing of particular events does not entail an interruption in the conscious experience of time flowing. If an alarm sounded during the evening, the fact that this was neither experienced at the time nor recalled later does not mean that there was a complete break in the flow of experience. Rather it could be akin to a situation in which someone is in such a deep conversation that an alarm goes unheard despite being within earshot. All that is required in order for there to be a continual flow of experiential time is for one experience to flow unbroken into the next.

If we fall rapidly into a deep sleep or into an unusual state of a similar kind, the *content* of our experience shifts away from ordinary sensory objects. But this does not mean that there is no content to our experiences in such states.[13] Rather there is simply no easy recollection of the sorts of objects that arose between entering a sleep-like state and leaving it. For example, during general anaesthetic, the cessation of sensory awareness might result in a stream of experiences so unusual that, while these experiences flow uninterrupted from earlier ordinary sensory experiences, they are ultimately retained in such a way that they are not properly recalled. If they are recalled at all, such experiences may not be recalled *as occurring between* the ordinary experiences on either side of being under general anaesthetic.

Ultimately, what is being claimed here is that conscious experience exhibits an *onflow* in which one phenomenal experience flows unbroken into the next and

[13] As discussed in the fourth chapter, it is difficult to say what degree of phenomenal consciousness might occur during states in which verbal reports and cognitive acts are not possible.

is experienced as such *when these experiences are occurring*. This claim does not involve an additional claim that every object within this flow can be recalled with equal ease. The experiences of a day's hike can flow uninterrupted from one to the next until the end of the day and *still* lead to a moment, at the end of the day, when an entire segment of the walk is difficult to recall. It is *when they are occurring* that conscious experiences demonstrate unbroken onflow.

Returning to the main discussion, in order to separate phenomenal awareness from the temporal structure of experience, the *onflow* of conscious experience must be accounted for. It must be possible to explain how dynamic experiences can appear as an unbroken flow. If the temporal structure of experience is ultimately separate from phenomenal awareness, it cannot be as dynamic as the flowing experiential objects, such as sounds, sensations, and so on, embedded within it. If the temporal structure were as dynamic as the objects embedded within it, phenomenal awareness would require yet another temporal structure just to be capable of experiencing this dynamic external temporal structure. In this case phenomenal awareness would still have an intrinsic temporal structure and the attempt to separate the two will have failed.

Therefore, a separable temporal structure must be a static object that presents the qualities embedded within it *as* flowing. In this case, a dynamic experience such as birdsong would not arise in real-time. Rather, there would be an unconscious temporal structure that organises sensory and other stimuli before they become phenomenally conscious. In this case all conscious experience would simply be awareness of pre-structured memories. Events would have passed and been retained by unconscious processes before they arose as conscious experiences. In this case the flow of conscious experience would not be the real-time unfolding of events. Such flow would be merely an appearance of time passing, it would not involve the passing of actual time.

This sort of possibility is dealt with by Barry Dainton in *Stream of Consciousness,* his exploration of the unity and continuity of consciousness. Part of *Stream of Consciousness* discusses the fact that, in order to account for the appearance of time passing without any real time, we must appeal to what

Dainton calls a *representational anti-realist* approach to temporal experiences. He describes such an approach as follows:

> At any instant, we are apprehending a content which although instantaneous also represents or encodes a temporal spread of phenomena, such as a sequence of notes or a perceived movement. When these contents are apprehended, in a momentary act of experiencing, the result is an awareness of a temporal spread of phenomena. A stream of consciousness consists of a continuous succession of these momentary acts of awareness, each apprehending a representation of a temporal spread of phenomena.[14]

According to the representational anti-realist, conscious experience of flowing phenomena is merely a representation of events *as if* they were unfolding in real time. Experiences of dynamic objects such as sounds and sensations are represented in a structure so as to *appear as if* there were an unbroken flow from one state to another in genuine time.

In order for such an account to work, the true object of phenomenal awareness must in fact be a *representation* that is structured so that the objects that appear within conscious experience appear *as if* they were flowing without breaks from one to the next.[15] For example, the experience of listening to birdsong would be a representation in which each "tweet" of birdsong seems to pass into short-term memory as a new "tweet" arises. In fact, both tweets would already be memories but the earlier one would be represented as being in the immediate past whilst the latter would be represented as being present-but-moving-into-the-immediate-past. This representation would then be followed by another in which both tweets were in the immediate and slightly-less-immediate past.

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[14] Barry Dainton, *Stream of Consciousness: Unity and continuity in conscious experience,* London, New York, Routledge, 2010, p.135.

[15] Something like this is envisioned by Daniel Dennett and Marcel Kinsbourne. See Daniel C. Dennett and Marcel Kinsbourne, 'Time and the Observer: The Where and When of Consciousness in the Brain', *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, Ned Block, Owen Flanagan, and Güven Güzeldere (eds.), MIT Press, 1997, pp.148-153.

However, even if all experiences are already memories, there will need to be a way for these memories to appear as the unbroken flow of events that we experience. When listening to birdsong we do not experience a distinct point at which one tweet ends and the next begins. The end of one tweet blends into a very brief pause, which blends into the next tweet. We do not even experience the point at which one tweet ends and the pause begins, or the point at which the pause ends and the tweet begins. These events flow rapidly, and without gaps or divisions, into one another.

To take a different example, when listening to Vaughan Williams' *Lark Ascending* we can recognise different sounds and phases of the music, we can also discern when one of these phases is beginning or ending. But these events are nonetheless experienced as the unbroken flow of one into the next. This experience involves awareness that *within* a sound or phase of a song there are more subtle dynamics and phases. Our ability to penetrate these more subtle or rapidly passing phases within the music is limited but we experience this limitation; we get a sense that there are distinct events going on but these are happening too rapidly for our temporal perspective to keep up with them. The unbroken flow of events is experienced as exceeding our apprehension of them. This is why the object of awareness appears intrinsically dynamic. If awareness of birdsong is awareness of remembered birdsong, or awareness of music is awareness of remembered music, these memories must still involve the exceedingly rapid, unbroken flow of events in order that the conscious experience of remembered birdsong and remembered music can be a subjectively unbroken one.

The problem here is that, in order to present awareness as an unbroken flow of events, such memory must either be (a) a real-time replay of the remembered events to awareness, or otherwise (b) a representation of events *as* unbroken flow. If we opt for (a) then the memory of birdsong or music will be just as dynamic and flowing as the original objects were. We would need to posit another temporal structure in order to allow awareness to experience the unbroken flow of the memory. Memory will have failed to explain the phenomenon that it was supposed to explain. Therefore we must opt for (b) if

we are looking to provide an account of temporal experience in which it does not involve any real-time flowing phenomena.

However, a representation of events *as if* they were unfolding in an unbroken flow must present all of those events to awareness and must do so by presenting the events together so that they can appear *as if* they flow from one to the other. A conscious experience of birdsong involves an unbroken flow of tweets, which means that any representation that accounts for this experience must represent each tweet *as* occurring within an unbroken flow. This means that any such representation of events must take a specific "block" of events and present this to awareness in order to produce the conscious experience of flowing events.

But such a "block" will have a distinct end-point. The final tweet that appears to occur in such a "block" will be experienced as the definitive present-moment-tweet. This would mean that we would experience a distinct, inert present moment that was the end-point in the unbroken flow of events. Of course, this is not what conscious experience is like. We do not experience the present moment as the stopping-point in a line of events but rather as a relentless continuing flow of events. To experience the present moment as *relentlessly* changing is part and parcel of experiencing events as an unbroken flow. The lack of gaps or breaks in the subjective experience of time is due to the fact that the present is experienced as the constant and continuous unfolding of events.

Whether it is a single tweet or a burst of music, any dynamic experience is a flurry of flowing events. If this experience was the result of a representation of events *as if* they were flowing in real-time, such a representation would represent the present *as if* it were *constantly* unfolding. But to experience a constantly unfolding present is to *constantly* experience *new events* that were not previously part of conscious experience. The experience of birdsong is a series of new experiences, each one a different tweet. But even the experience of a single tweet is a series of new experiences in which every subtle sound that constitutes a tweet appears and flows into the next. A representation of

such an experience would have to be just as dynamic and flowing as the experiences that it is supposed to explain.[16]

It is for these reasons that our experience of the unbroken flow of events and the constant unfolding of the present cannot be accounted for using a temporal structure that is not itself dynamically unfolding. It does not matter whether this temporal structure takes the form of preformed memories or representations of events, it must involve constant change in order to account for the kind of unbroken conscious experience that *we* have. But this means that such temporal structures do not explain how it is possible to be aware of constantly unfolding, dynamic phenomena. If awareness of constantly unfolding, dynamic phenomena is only possible in virtue of a structure which is also a constantly unfolding dynamic phenomenon, this structure *cannot be an object of awareness.* Such a temporal structure could not be an object of awareness because awareness would require another temporal structure in order to experience it. Any intrinsically dynamic flowing object such as a tweet, musical beat, or throbbing sensation, can only be experienced if there is a temporal structure to bring the different phases of the object together in a single experience. But if the temporal structure is yet another dynamic object, it is useless in explaining how flowing experiences are possible.

Therefore, the only way to adequately account for dynamic, flowing conscious experiences is to posit a temporal structure that is inseparable from consciousness, being precisely the *way in which* dynamic phenomena are apprehended by phenomenal awareness. Phenomenal awareness would apprehend dynamic phenomena by "illuminating", retaining, temporally structuring, and recalling them *as they pass.* Conscious experience of a dynamic phenomenon would require that phenomenal awareness is

[16] The full range and seriousness of the problems facing representational anti-realist approaches to temporal experience are dealt with in much greater depth in Dainton, *Stream of Consciousness,* pp.113-182.

relentlessly apprehending, retaining, anticipating, temporally structuring, and recalling the flow of the phenomenon in question.

7.4 Interlude: Abhidharma Philosophy and Time

In order to understand why it is so important that phenomenal awareness has this relentlessly operating temporal structure we must first gain some clarity on how the unfolding flow of events must be just as unbroken as our experience of them. Reasons for considering everything in reality to be a matter of relentlessly unfolding events can be found by exploring the Abhidharma principles that operate as the foundations of Buddhist philosophy. According to the third principle of Abhidharma philosophy, which was introduced in the second chapter, there are no breaks or gaps in the flow of events. Events unfold in an uninterrupted continuity and this uninterruptedness exists at every level of reality.[17] But this Continuity Principle is rooted in the first principle of Abhidharma, the Chariot Principle.

As explained in the second chapter, just as a chariot is simply a label given to the parts that make it what it is, so too can every complex entity be analysed into the plurality of simple constituents from which that entity has 'borrowed' its complex nature.[18] Any complex phenomenon can only have the characteristics that it has in virtue of its parts or qualities. If a phenomenon has a property that cannot be traced back to the configuration of its parts, this property must either be yet another part or must have appeared by brute emergence. As we have seen, the occurrence of brute emergence is something that no intelligible theory should include. Therefore, no complex phenomenon can be anything over and above the configuration of more fundamental phenomena. This entails that, ultimately, reality consists of those fundamental factors out of which every complex phenomenon is configured. These simple and fundamental factors

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[17] Y. Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma: Its Inquiry Into the Nature of Conditioned Reality*. Centre for Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong, 2010, p.234.
[18] Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, Hackett Publishing, 2007, p.113.

must exist in order for there to be something that accounts for the internal constitution of complex phenomena. And, most importantly, these factors must be instances of particular simple qualities. Configurations of these basic qualities account for every more complex phenomenon. Each basic quality is a single instance of a single simple fundamental quality, called a *dharma,* which is defined by its particular *intrinsic* nature.[19] This intrinsic nature is not borrowed from anything more fundamental, it is simply the type of quality that the particular dharma *is*. And, if there were no fundamental dharmas with their own distinctive, intrinsic natures, there would be nothing to give anything any distinctive nature at all.[20]

Insofar as reality is constituted out of configurations of dharmas, the evident changes in this reality must be the result of changes to the way in which dharmas are configured with one another. But this does not mean that a particular dharma travels around, joining with other dharmas and then separating later. Dharmas are too simple to exist as independent entities separated from any configuration with others. Once we have reduced every complex phenomenon to irreducible, unanalysable factors we are left with basic qualities that cannot exist without other qualities to support them. No particular dharma lasts longer than the particular configuration of which it is a part.[21]

To return to an example used in the second chapter, the quality of solidness, taken in its simplest form, requires qualities like extension or shape. Without any kind of extended shape, an instance of solidity would lack any spatial dimensions and so could not be said to exist at all. Ultimately every dharma can only arise in a configuration with other dharmas.[22] This configuration allows a dharma to exist but also determines precisely *how* it exists. An extended field

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[19] Ibid., p.111.

[20] Paul Williams, 'Response to Mark Siderits' Review', *Philosophy East and West,* Vol. 50, No. 3, July 2000, p.439

[21] According to Abhidharma philosophical principles, no dharma can last long enough to move, rather a new instance arises in each new location. See Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, pp.165,166.

[22] Ibid. pp.20-22. See also K. L. Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma,* Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong, 2007, p.259.

of solidity is a different instance of solidity depending on its shape, but without *any* shape there would be no instances of solidity at all. Insofar as neither shape nor solidity can exist in isolation, the way in which they exist is determined by the whole configuration of which they are a part. A change in a configuration brings about a change in every dharma that depends for its existence on that configuration and so brings about a new instance of every dharma in that configuration. Insofar as a dharma is an instance of a particular dependent quality, it cannot last longer than the other qualities on which it depends for its existence.

Of course, in order for the world to be as intelligible as it is, each instance of a particular type of dharma must be followed by an instance of the same type: an instance of solidity follows another instance. This is because the homogeneous cause of any dharma is a prior dharma of the same type: an instance of fundamental solidity would have as its homogeneous cause an immediately preceding instance of fundamental solidity. Without this preceding homogeneous cause there would be nothing determining the precise nature of any particular occurrence of a quality. In this case qualities of any type could appear at any time. Causation, so far as it existed, would be brute and the world would be unintelligible. Insofar as we rule out brute causation, we must accept that every instance of a dharma of a particular type is the latest in a beginningless stream of dharmas, a stream of instances of the same type of quality.[23]

However, each instance in a *dharma stream* is dependent upon other types of dharma, instances of other qualities. Just as solidity must intersect with and be conditioned by shape in order to exist, it must be the case that different dharma streams are constantly intersecting and conditioning one another, thus producing the configurations in virtue of which each instance exists. And in order for configurations of dharmas to account for our evidently changing reality, these configurations must be able to change. This means that different

[23] Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, p.45.

types of dharma must arise in different configurations at different times, which entails that different streams of dharmas intersect differently at different times. Given that reality is ultimately constituted by dharmas, there is nothing else in reality that could guide the intersection of streams other than the dharmas themselves.

But any particular dharma, on its own, would be far too simple to determine the variety of configurations that constitute our reality. An instance of solidity, for example, lacks the complexity to determine which other factors future instances will arise with. A complex configuration of dharmas, on the other hand, could bring together the variety of factors needed to determine future configurations. An extended region of solidity *with* momentum could give rise to extended solidity in a different region. In this case it is the *momentum* that turns one configuration of qualities into another and this momentum continues into the next configuration. But if each instance of momentum performed the same operation, the particular configuration would only ever change in one way. In this case instances of extended solidity would arise in a stream going in one direction only.

The problem here is that every instance of every quality other than momentum would be an inert epiphenomenon, having no influence on the momentum that gives rise to these qualities at different locations. The fact that an extended field of solidity occupying a particular place in space-time was *extended* and *solid* would have no influence over its direction even if there was another extended field of solidity that made contact with it. If there were distinct dynamic forces that determined every future configuration of dharmas, it would not be the solidity or the extended shape of an object that influenced its interactions with other solid objects, it would simply be the result of a fixed force.

The situation becomes even more absurd when we consider the fact that the particular quality of colours, sounds, smells, sensations, and thoughts influence bodily behaviour all the time by virtue of their having the intrinsic qualities that they have. A bad smell is what motivates us to leave a room; a beautiful vista

encourages us to linger for a time rather than walk on.[24] These experiences only have the qualities that they do by virtue of the particular configuration of fundamental factors that they are. Each factor that constitutes an experience exerts an influence on every other such that its influence is felt. This is true of all configurations of dharmas because dharmas are not inert particles, they are factors that *condition* other factors so as to enable configuration. If an instance of solidity did not *solidify* a region of space and *obstruct* other instances of solidity it would not be an instance of solidity. But to *solidify* and *obstruct* are effects or influences, they are activities or operations rather than just inert states. To put it another way, dharmas are *doings* not just *beings*. A dharma is defined by the particular quality instance that it is but this instantiation or quality does not simply *have* an influence, it *is* an influence: every dharma does something particular to others and this is how it is known.[25]

Therefore, insofar as a dharma is an instance of a particular type of influence on other dharmas, there cannot be an inert dharma. Every dharma that constitutes what a complex phenomenon *is* also determines what that complex phenomenon *does*. This is why the particular configuration of dharmas that determines precisely what a complex phenomenon is also determines how that phenomenon transforms. Each dharma has a conditioning influence on every other factor involved in the configuration and so influences the way in which streams of dharmas will be configured in future. Insofar as an instance of momentum, for example, arises in a configuration, it must be conditioned by the other factors that it is configured with, just as solidity is conditioned by shape. Momentum, solidity, and extension would all condition and modify one another. Of course, each factor will condition the others in its own way and momentum would condition the other factors by transforming them into another iteration in

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[24] At this point I am ruling out epiphenomenalism regarding phenomenal qualities without further argument. It seems quite strange that such a view was ever entertained given that the very discussion of "qualia" requires that these qualia can influence the physical world enough that philosophical papers can be written about them. For the initial argument that set this whole issue off, see Frank Jackson, 'Epiphenomenal Qualia', *Philosophical Quarterly,* pp.127-136, Vol. 32, April, 1982.

[25] See Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, p.22. See also Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, p.195.

a new location. But with each new iteration there would be new factors involved and these would condition the dynamic dharma of momentum, thus modifying its operations. In this way, the factors determining how any given stream of dharmas intersects with another must be responsive to the nature of particular configurations just as those factors are, in turn, reconfigured by it.

Furthermore, in virtue of the intrinsic dynamism of dharmas, no configuration of dharmas can last for longer than the time it takes for each dharma in that configuration to be conditioned or modified by the other factors with which it is configured. Once this conditioning has occurred, each dharma will perform a modified version of the operation that defines it. In the case of momentum, this would amount to something like transforming a set of dharmas into another set in a new location. This operation would be different depending on the type of dharma and the way in which it was modified. An instance of volition, for example, might respond differently to other dharmas and transform in a different way to the way that an instance of momentum would.

At this point it is worth clarifying that neither momentum, solidity, extension, nor volition need to be taken as dharma types in order for it to follow that dharmas must be defined by their particular conditioning influence on others. Insofar as dharmas are *doings* not just *beings* every dharma conditions the others with which it is configured according to its very nature as a dharma. This conditioning influence is part and parcel of what a configuration of dharmas is.

Furthermore, as soon as conditioning has taken place, none of the original dharmas that constituted the configuration remain. For example, if a dharma of solidity (Dharma S1) arises into a new configuration with another instance of solidity (Dharma S2), both dharmas will condition each other. This mutual conditioning will alter each instance of solidity in some way. As just discussed, if being in a configuration did not alter dharmas themselves, the configuration of dharmas would make no difference to reality. But this inevitable alteration means that Dharmas S1 and S2 will both become different instances of solidity as a result of mutual conditioning. And insofar as dharmas are single instances, this entails that “Dharma S1 *before* being conditioned*”* and “Dharma S1 *after* being conditioned” are actually two different dharmas. Let’s call them Dharma

S1 and Dharma S1+. Equally there will be a Dharma S2 and a Dharma S2+. We are now dealing with four dharmas: S1, S1+, S2, and S2+, which are all the same *type* of dharma. And yet, we are only dealing with two dharma streams. S1 and S1+ belong to the same stream of dharmas insofar as S1 is the homogeneous cause for S1+. The same goes for S2 and S2+. Nonetheless, the conditioning process means we are dealing with different instantiations of solidity, different particular dharmas.

Hopefully, this example has demonstrated why a particular dharma lasts no longer than the time it takes to condition other dharmas and be subjected to their conditioning influence. Once a particular configuration has arisen, the conditioning influence of each dharma in that configuration transforms every dharma, as well as the whole configuration, into something different. This entails that any particular configuration of dharmas lasts no longer than the time it takes to exist *as a particular configuration.* Once a particular configuration has arisen, each dharma in that particular configuration conditions and is conditioned by every other in a particular way. This mutual conditioning alters the whole configuration. The result is that the arising of a particular configuration of dharmas brings about the end of that particular configuration.

For example, if we take a ball that has been thrown through the air, we can analyse this object into a range of dharmas. There might be dharmas of solidity, extension, momentum, and others besides, all configured into the thrown ball. But this configuration does not remain the same from one moment to the next. The precise way in which the momentum, extended shape, and solidity are configured keeps changing as the ball moves through the air. As the solidity of the ball interacts with the solidity of air particles, the momentum of the ball alters. This alteration is a modification of the entire configuration and as such brings about a new instantiation of every dharma that constitutes the moving ball. Every interaction between the moving-ball-configuration and its environment, or between the dharmas *within* the moving-ball-configuration, amounts to an alteration that marks a new instantiation of dharmas. We could say that each instance of the moving ball decays into new dharmas. If these new dharmas remain in a similar configuration then we say that the ball

continues to exist. But if these dharmas are conditioned so as to enter different configurations, the ball might disintegrate.

Likewise, we can say that every complex phenomenon, being a configuration of inter-conditioning dharmas, decays into other phenomena as soon as it has finished arising from the decay of preceding phenomena. The only gap or break in the process that one might try to identify would be the point at which a configuration has finished arising but is not yet decaying.

But such a break or gap cannot be found.

Configurations arise in virtue of the interplay of fundamental inter-conditioning constituents, which are defined by their particular conditioning influence. These constituent factors must exert and influence constantly otherwise they would stop being the fundamental conditioning factors that they are. These conditioning factors must be *fundamentally* involved in conditioning others in order to be the ultimate factors that explain particular changes. If we analyse any changing phenomenon down to its fundamental constituents, there must be constituent factors that account for the changes that take place in the phenomenon. If any such factor were to stop its defining conditioning activity, it would cease to exist, and insofar as it ceased to exist there would be no way to get it back short of brute causation or emergence. But there is no reason to suppose that a stream of instances of conditioning activity would suddenly, inexplicably, turn into factors that are no longer active or influential: this would also involve brute causation. For this reason, fundamentally active factors must be part of any view of the world that can account for the evident changes that take place in reality.

Fundamentally the factors that constitute complex phenomena are intrinsically active or dynamic, which means that they are always changing, by their very nature, rather than occasionally or when certain extrinsic conditions are met. Inert, inactive factors play no role in conditioning or influencing anything in wider reality and so cannot be said to exist in any meaningful way. This leaves only dynamic factors capable of conditioning others. For a dynamic factor to exist is for it to change *constantly* in virtue of the intrinsic conditioning activity that

defines it. Insofar as dynamic factors must be the conditions in virtue of which different configurations arise at different times, those configurations cannot be inert or static. This is why, in the very moment when a particular configuration of factors has arisen, the dynamic factors that gave rise to it must continue operating and so immediately begin the process of bringing it to an end.

Therefore, the changing phenomena that we encounter in our experience are fundamentally fleeting configurations of intrinsically dynamic factors. Every complex phenomenon, being such a configuration, is constantly transforming into another. Every fundamental factor that constitutes a complex phenomenon is, likewise, constantly transforming into a new iteration as part of a new configuration. The fundamental factors or dharmas, which constitute reality, are relentlessly reconfiguring. Every event or phenomenon that we can encounter or be influenced by, whether it is a conscious phenomenon or not, is embedded in this unbroken flow of reconfiguration. This flow is unbroken because there is no temporal part of it in which there is not some degree of dynamism. This is a foundational principle of Buddhist philosophy that is well summarised by Rupert Gethin:

> [H]owever one looks at it, reality is a process; analyse reality down to its smallest possible components or constituents, and what one finds are, not static building blocks, but dynamic processes.[26]

No matter how much we analyse an unfolding event, there cannot be a temporal slice of it that is inert. Such inertia would mean that the temporal slice in question was something unchanging and such an unchanging micro-event would not involve any dynamic factors. In that briefest of moments, the factors driving the flow of events would stop and become completely different, inert factors. At this point in time the factors driving the whole flow of events will have completely disappeared and time itself would come to an end. It is quite reasonable to assume that this kind of brute micro-transformation has never happened in the past and cannot be said to happen in an intelligible universe.

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[26] Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism,* p.155.

It would be most reasonable to assume that all events are changing and flowing in some way “all the way down”. The radical, bottomless dynamism of events means that there are no gaps or breaks in the flow, no interstices or pauses between moments in which nothing happens. Put simply, if events stop *happening*, there is no event left that could *happen* in order to make the world start up again.

Insofar as all phenomena and all events are radically dynamic, any awareness of even the shortest imaginable event is awareness of something that is passing away *as it occurs within conscious awareness*. Conscious experience, being a concrete, temporally unfolding phenomenon, is only possible in virtue of an awareness of events as they unfold. This actually rules out an approach to conscious experience in which awareness of the present can be separated from the recollection of past objects. Here we might recall that in the fourth chapter (section 4.4) it was mentioned that some Abhidharma systems considered consciousness to be an absolutely simple dharma that can be separated from any capacity for memory or recollection. At this point we must recognise that such separation is impossible. Any awareness of a genuinely flowing object requires that retention is inseparable from awareness. For events to occur is for them to pass away. Therefore, awareness of these events requires an awareness that can consciously “hold on” as the event is passing away.

For example, if I am listening to a chorus of birdsong I cannot have a present experience of a single tweet without this already involving immediate retention and recall. Even the shortest of tweets consists of temporal parts, which means that an experience of the tweet itself requires that some of these parts were retained and are recalled with the present temporal part of the tweet. But this assumes that there is a static present “tweet-moment” that can be given in conscious experience without needing to be retained in awareness. Such an event would not be part of the relentless flow of time. A genuinely temporal tweet flows from temporal part to temporal part no matter how brief these parts are. Therefore, the conscious experience of a tweet must involve the constant retention of the unbroken flow of temporal parts of the tweet and this retention

must be retention-in-awareness. Passing temporal parts must remain in awareness long enough to constitute the conscious experience of a tweet.

Of course, the experience of listening to birdsong involves more than a series of discrete tweets. Each tweet that passes is retained in awareness as the next tweet arises. This conscious retention of passing events is what makes the twittering of birds possible as a conscious experience. Phenomenal objects like birdsong must remain in conscious experience as they pass away in order for them to appear as "thick" experiences. Without this "thickness" there would not even be a brief momentary experience because such a moment would have to be inert. Conscious experience of genuine, concrete, temporally embedded events must be temporally extended, or "thick", in order to show up at all. And this thickness depends on the "backlog" of passing events within conscious experience. Passing events are retained long enough to extend into the conscious experience of a "thick" present. Without this immediate retention and conscious recall of events, the temporal extension or "thickening" of conscious experience would not be possible and dynamic, temporal experiences would not be possible. That such experiences are possible tells us that conscious experience involves an immediate retention and conscious recall of events.

Furthermore, insofar as this process is one of immediate retention and immediate *conscious* recall, the illuminating character of phenomenal consciousness cannot be separated from it. Without a retentive-recollecting capacity, illuminating awareness would not be anything at all. To illuminate events is precisely to bring them into phenomenal consciousness. Retentive-recall is required in order for passing events to be illuminated *as they pass.* Without arising with an inseparable factor of retention, illumination would not be able to bring more than a single moment into phenomenal awareness. Illumination would involve the present moment and nothing more. But because the present moment is not an inert state, even conscious illumination of the present moment requires the capacity to retain the present moment as it passes. To put it another way, conscious experience of passing events is *necessarily thick* and such experience requires a form of awareness that retains passing events in order to produce thick experiences. Insofar as *our* conscious

experiences are thick experiences, we can assume that the phenomenal awareness that is a constituent factor in these conscious experiences has an inseparable retentive-recollecting factor.

7.5 Conscious Retention and Mindfulness

As has been previously mentioned, the earliest Buddhist philosophers did not consider any instance of consciousness to arise alone. Any conscious event arises along with a variety of concomitant factors. Some of these factors are occasional, arising with consciousness under certain conditions. Other factors were considered universal mental factors, arising with every instance of consciousness. One of the factors considered to be universal within the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma system was called *smṛti* (Sanskrit) or *sati* (Pali).[27] Nowadays this universal mental factor is almost exclusively referred to in English as “mindfulness” but in his essay ‘On some definitions of mindfulness’, Rupert Gethin examines other ways of describing the factor in which it is closely related to memory:

> The early Abhidhamma literature lists a number of terms that are intended to illustrate the nature of sati and which are of some interest: recollection (anussati), recall (paṭissati), remembrance (saraṇatā), keeping in mind (dhāraṇatā), absence of floating (apilāpanatā), absence of forgetfulness (asammussanatā).[28]

Gethin goes on to explore how, according to canonical descriptions, to be mindful is to recall or remember, particularly in the short-term sense. To be mindful of the breath is to continually remember that one is attending to the sensations of the breath. To be mindful of the body is to continually remember the posture of the body, or the composition of the body, or the impermanence of the body:

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[27] Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, p.285.
[28] Rupert Gethin, 'On some definitions of mindfulness', *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1, May 2011, p.270.

> The key element in the early definitions, it seems to me, is that they take the sense of sati as 'remembering' seriously. The basic idea here is straightforward: if one is instructed to observe the breath and be aware whether it is a long breath or short breath, one needs to remember to do this, rather than forget after a minute, five minutes, 30 minutes, and so forth. That is, one has to remember that what it is one should be doing is remembering the breath.[29]

Mindfulness carries with it the connotation of something like the short-term memory that allows each passing moment to involve a recollection of what went before. In fact, this definition of mindfulness is essential if another Abhidharma claim is to be viable. According to both the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma systems, there is only ever consciousness of one object at a time.[30] When there seems to be awareness of multiple objects at once there is in fact only a series of rapidly passing moments of awareness of different objects.[31] This account is only adequate if we make a distinction between the apprehension of objects by consciousness and the actual conscious experience of them. If there was only ever conscious experience of singular objects, there would not even *appear to be* an experience of multiple objects at once.

However, this does not rule out the possibility that there is only ever the apprehension of a single object at a time. As long as consciousness continually arises with a capacity for mindfulness *as retentive-recollection* the apprehension of single objects will rapidly result in a conscious experience of multiple objects. Of course, all but one of these objects will be nothing more than recollections of events retained by the temporal structure that arises with consciousness. Regardless, the Abhidharma assumption that consciousness apprehends or "illuminates" a single passing object at a time would be accurate. In this way we can bring together our independent argument for the intrinsically retentive-recollecting nature of consciousness and the Sarvāstivāda

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[29] Ibid.
[30] See Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, pp.20-22. See also Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma,* pp.273-287.
[31] See Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism,* p.211.

Abhidharma Buddhist claim that consciousness always arises with mindfulness. For ease we could refer to retentive-recollection as mindfulness.

The inseparability of phenomenal consciousness and mindfulness allows the relentless flow of events to be captured in the form of conscious experiences as they pass away. These inseparable factors also maintain an unbroken flow of conscious experience and an unbroken flow of subjectivity through time. Each object of experience is experienced as flowing into the past and being immediately replaced by a new object, which in turn is flowing into the past and being immediately replaced, and so on without interruption. The conscious subject of each of these different objects flows unbroken into the next such that the subject of one experience becomes the subject of the next. This unbroken flow of conscious subjects could only stop if either mindfulness, phenomenal consciousness, or its objects were to disappear or these three factors were to become separated.

However, we now have good reasons to believe that the separation of any of these factors would result in their complete disappearance and the irreversible unviability of the whole configuration of conscious experience. Mindfulness must be inseparable from phenomenal consciousness in order for conscious experience of fundamentally dynamic events to be possible. As we saw in the last section, all phenomena are constantly reconfiguring and transforming such that there is no gap, break, or pause in the relentless flow from one dynamic event to the next. Conscious experiences are just as concretely real as any other phenomenon, which means that they too must be constantly changing. But conscious experiences are appearances within phenomenal consciousness, which means that the ever-changing nature of these appearances must be "captured" *within phenomenal consciousness.* Mindfulness, as retentive-recollection, is required in order to "capture" dynamic conscious experiences as they pass so that they can occur *as conscious experiences* and so arise at all. If there were no mindfulness involved in conscious experiences, there would not be any conscious experience.

Therefore, conscious experiences, as dynamic phenomena, could not be conscious if the consciousness of them was incapable of being conscious of

their dynamism. There is nothing to any phenomenon, including a conscious experience, once we remove dynamism or activity because every phenomenon has an intrinsically active nature. Every fundamental factor that constitutes *what reality is* actively conditions and influences others, which leads to a constant unfolding process of inter-conditioning configuration of fundamental factors. Without this conditioning activity, and without the time in which this activity takes place, there is nothing left of the reality in which we live. Without time there is no activity but without *conscious experience* of time there is no *conscious experience* of this activity. Mindfulness is required in order for experience of time to be possible. In this way, the separation of mindfulness from any other constituent factor of conscious experience completely removes those other factors.

For example, without mindfulness there cannot be any dynamic objects of consciousness, neither can there be phenomenal objects or proto-phenomenal objects. Sounds, smells, tastes, sights, sensations, thoughts, and urges are all actively unfolding processes “all the way down”. Without the mindful consciousness to retain and consciously recollect these objects as they pass there is simply nothing that it is like to experience them. Nor can these dynamic objects survive as proto-phenomenal objects with proto-phenomenal qualities. Proto-phenomenal qualities are only coherent if they are the qualities that determine what it is like for something to arise within conscious experience *if and when it does arise in conscious experience.* When there is no consciousness of them, proto-phenomenal qualities are merely the potential for a particular conscious experience.

As we have already seen, there must be a temporal structure in virtue of which dynamic experiences, which we now know means *all experiences*, can have any of their defining phenomenal qualities. While the proto-phenomenal qualities of sounds, sights, sensations, and so on, could exist without there necessarily being a consciousness that they appear to, these proto-phenomenal qualities could not exist without the temporal structure that makes these qualities capable of constituting *dynamic* experiences. Timeless objects without duration would not have any of the qualities that are necessary in order

to account for what our experience of sounds, sights, sensations, and so on is like. The proto-phenomenal qualities of these experiences cannot be separated from the temporal structure that conditions them into “thick” temporal phenomena that occur over time.

However, in order for this temporal structure to play an integral role in making the phenomenal qualities of dynamic experiences what they are, it must involve both the retention of passing events *and* their recollection alongside the newly occurring present. Without this retention and then immediate recollection, passing events could not be “thickened up” into temporal objects with the type of qualities that arise in conscious experience. But it is not at all clear what this essential recollection would be if it were not *conscious recollection* through which events that have passed remain as constitutive factors in the “thick” moment of conscious experience. When we speak of the “thickness” of a moment, we are referring to the way in which passing events *appear within consciousness*. Without the conscious recollection of events as they pass, any retention of passing events would be a mere *storing* of those events as information in some non-conscious form.

Furthermore, even if there was a kind of storing process that also involved a kind of retrieval, none of these processes would amount to anything like the phenomenally conscious structure that is evident when we experience, for example, a note of music fading into the past as new notes arise. In this case we cannot posit a proto-phenomenally conscious structure because the fading of the music into the past is a feature of the phenomenology of time, it is a feature of the way that time is consciously experienced. Phenomenal qualities are conscious dynamic qualities, not simply dynamic qualities that have become conscious. The musical notes fade into a memory that is no less conscious for being a peripheral feature of our awareness. Without consciousness there can be no experience of a sound fading into memory nor are there any of the qualities that make this experience the way it is. The qualities in question are inseparable from the temporal structure of consciousness. I remember which song it is that I am listening to in large part because I am still aware, in an implicit sense, of the musical notes that have

passed away. To put it another way, I am mindful of the notes that are now gone from vivid, present awareness.

7.6 Conclusion: The Impossible Beginnings of Conscious Experience

The temporal structure of phenomenal consciousness is the temporal structure *of phenomenal consciousness.* To speak of "thick" moments and events receding into the past is precisely to describe "what it is like" to be conscious of dynamic phenomena. The factors that account for these features of conscious experience are inseparable from phenomenal consciousness. Without phenomenal consciousness, none of these features could exist, nor can they exist as proto-phenomenal features. The precise quality of what it is like to hear a sound or feel a sensation drift into the past is not analysable into non-conscious qualities because these qualities are inseparable from conscious experience and the way that events are retained and recollected within it. A form of mindfulness or temporal structure without phenomenal consciousness would completely lack the qualities required to account for the phenomenal features involved in experiencing the fleetingness of objects. The objects themselves, insofar as we take them to be devoid of phenomenal consciousness, would also lack the required qualities to account for these features. This leaves only phenomenal consciousness itself. But in isolation from mindfulness, phenomenal consciousness cannot experience dynamic objects and so would also be incapable of accounting for the specific qualities involved in experiencing the dynamism and fleetingness of events.

Taken separately, none of the above three factors have any of the characteristics, features, or qualities necessary to account for what it is like to experience things happening. We cannot trace the phenomenal qualities of dynamic conscious experience back to any of the features found in an isolated phenomenal consciousness, an isolated temporal structure, or non-conscious unstructured events. This means that we would have to appeal to brute emergence in order to get these qualities from a combination or configuration of these factors, if they were separate. To avoid such an appeal, all we need to

do is take phenomenal consciousness to have an inseparable temporal structure in virtue of which dynamic objects can be retained within consciousness as they pass away and then immediately consciously recollected along with the newly arriving present. This would involve accepting that there is an indivisible cluster of factors that includes both phenomenal consciousness, which illuminates phenomena so that they can appear *within conscious experience*, and mindfulness, which retains and immediately recollects phenomena so that they can appear *as dynamic events.* It is worth pointing out here that neither phenomenal consciousness nor mindfulness needs to be considered an unanalysable dharma. Despite being complex, insofar as consciousness and mindfulness form an indivisible cluster it follows that whatever dharmas they might consist of would be no more separable than the factors into which they are configured.

Furthermore, instances of phenomenal consciousness and mindfulness must constantly arise together in a stream of illuminating and retaining activity. Given that these activities define what mindfulness and consciousness are, the cessation of such activity would mean the complete annihilation of these streams. As was established in the last section, the fundamental phenomena that constitute reality are activities, not just inert states. Conscious illumination and retention are processes with distinctive features that cannot be reduced to other processes without the whole complex structure of conscious experience becoming not only non-existent but completely impossible. If we try to offer an account of the origin of consciousness in which we go back to a time before a particular stream of conscious experience existed, we must posit either the absence or isolation of mindfulness, phenomenal consciousness, or both. If there is the illuminating, retaining-recollection of objects then there is an unbroken stream of conscious experience with an unbroken stream of conscious subjects. But if any one of these factors is stripped out or decomposed into something else, whether it is the illumination of objects, the retaining-recollection of objects, or the possibility of objects themselves, the phenomenal qualities that define what makes conscious experience so distinctive vanish *without a trace.*

Any distinctive phenomenon that cannot exist as the distinctive phenomenon that it is without conscious experience cannot exist prior to conscious experience. But nor can such distinctive phenomena emerge brutally once conscious experience arises. There must be preceding factors that determine the precise qualitative nature of a subject experiencing, for example, a series of musical sounds. But these precise qualities are what constitutes the experience itself, without these qualities there is not enough to constitute the precise nature of the experience. If we posit a time when there were no streams of consciousness we have already removed too much. We will never be able to explain the arising of consciousness because the phenomenal qualities that we need in order for this explanation to work exist in virtue of the distinctive temporal and subjective structure of conscious experience.

It is for these reasons that the origins of any given stream of consciousness can only coherently be accounted for with reference to a prior instance in that same stream of consciousness. In previous chapters we have encountered reasons to doubt that streams could merge or separate as this would annihilate subjects of experience. In this chapter we have seen how the separation of phenomenal consciousness from the retaining-recollecting process of mindfulness makes phenomenal consciousness of dynamic, ever-changing phenomena impossible.

Any view that considers a stream of conscious experience to arise from non-conscious factors is committed to the view that phenomenal consciousness, the phenomenal qualities that arise during the experience of dynamic objects, and the subject of experiences, all appear out of factors devoid of the *phenomenal* qualities that make these distinctive features what they are. But without these phenomenal qualities the factors in question would be inadequate to the task of constituting conscious experience. We would need to posit brute emergence in order for conscious experience to arise. This is why any view that considers a stream of conscious experience to arise from non-conscious factors is committed to appealing to brute emergence. As we have seen, a view that appeals to brute emergence renders the world unintelligible, which is why a view that seeks the origins of a stream of consciousness in non-conscious

factors presents the world as an unintelligible one in which no view or theory can be relied upon because factors could appear from anywhere at any time.

Therefore, we are much better off taking the view that an instance of conscious experience is preceded by a prior instance of conscious experience and that this stream of instances is unbroken. We can also now say that each instance in this stream must also be an instance of retaining-recollection in which the immediate past is retained along with the present. This means that each instance of conscious experience maintains an unbroken stream of subjective experiences in which the subject of one experience becomes the subject of the next without gaps or breaks. In this way, we have found reasons to support Dharmakīrti's overall argument for the unbroken continuity of conscious events. Physical birth cannot be the point at which conscious experience brutally emerges from non-conscious factors nor can death be the point at which the stream of illuminating, retaining-recollection brutally transforms into completely different non-conscious factors.

8. Psychological Continuity Between Lives

8.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we explored the reasons for adopting the view that an instance of conscious experience is preceded by a prior instance of mindful conscious experience in which the immediate past is retained and recollected along with the present. According to such a view, the flow from one instance of mindful conscious experience to the next is relentless and unbroken, entailing a beginningless and endless stream of consciousness. Insofar as each instance of mindful conscious experience maintains an unbroken stream of subjective experiences, the subject of one experience becomes the subject of the next without gaps or breaks. These reasons support Dharmakīrti's overall argument for the unbroken continuity of conscious events before birth and after death. Physical birth cannot be the point at which conscious experience brutally emerges from non-conscious factors nor can death be the point at which the stream of illuminating, retaining-recollection brutally transforms into completely different non-conscious factors.

However, Dharmakīrti's argument is an argument for *rebirth* and as such must be able to establish that, after bodily death, a particular stream of consciousness can become configured with a different body and so live a different life.[1] In order to establish that a stream of consciousness is capable of reconfiguring coherently with different physical bodies we must consider how the physical body and wider physical world are related to conscious events. This will involve addressing the question of mental causation, which is the question of how conscious mental events can interact with physical events

[1] It is worth pointing out here that traditional Buddhist cosmology does not consider every future or past life to involve physical embodiment. The Formless God realms, for example, are realms without physicality. Nevertheless, there must be means by which a stream of embodied consciousness can become a stream of differently-embodied consciousness in order for Buddhist cosmology, as a whole, to be maintained. For more on the issues around being reborn as a non-physical Formless being, see Paul J. Griffiths, *On Being Mindless,* Delhi, Sri Satguru Publications, 1999.

without breaking energy conservation laws. It will also involve addressing the neuroscientific evidence suggesting that our cognitive lives are dependent upon brain functions. This relationship between conscious events and physical events must be addressed before we can begin to suggest ways in which a stream of conscious events that are configured with one set of physical phenomena comes to be configured with another after death.

And yet, establishing that a stream of consciousness can arise with different physical bodies is not enough to establish sufficient psychological continuity between one life and the next to allow for Buddhist practices of mental cultivation to bear fruits in future lives. This is perhaps the most important point to be established given that the entire purpose of Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth was to offer reasons to believe that the Buddha was no ordinary being. Dharmakīrti's purpose was to give reasons for believing that the Buddha was extraordinarily compassionate and wise due to multiple lifetimes of diligent practice and mental cultivation. If there is no rebirth, the Buddha would not have had enough time to develop these qualities to a supreme degree. Without rebirth, the Buddha would have to either have been simply "born special", which makes his advice on self-cultivation somewhat suspect, or otherwise the Buddha may have only been as much of a virtuoso in compassion and wisdom as any other serious spiritual practitioner of the time. The authority of the Buddha and his teachings comes from the idea that his claims to have spent countless lifetimes perfecting certain qualities are true. But these claims can only be true if rebirth is possible.

Nevertheless, even if streams of conscious events arise over countless lifetimes, this does not establish any practically important psychological development across lives. If the decomposition of the body and brain at death results in the dissolution of all psychological traits, there is nothing to carry psychological development over from one life to another. As a result, rebirth loses its relevance when it comes to mind training practices, such as mindfulness, because nothing about a person's psychology remains after they die. Whether they cultivated the most miserable disposition or the most joyful openheartedness, their subjectivity would dissolve into its most basic

constituents with nothing maintaining these tendencies. Any mind that arose after death would have no psychologically relevant connection to a past life regardless of any other continuities between one life and another.

However, we have already encountered reasons to believe that conscious experience is inseparable from an intrinsic form of mindfulness, understood as a fundamental process of retention and recollection in which events are maintained within a conscious temporal structure after they have passed away. Insofar as this process of mindfulness is inseparable from consciousness, mindful conscious events can maintain an unbroken subjective continuity in which immediately past conscious events arise with present ones. This means that psychological factors from the immediate past are retained in present consciousness.

In sections 8.2 and 8.3 of this chapter it will be argued that, while the mindfulness that is inseparable from consciousness seems to establish only a very short-term psychological continuity between conscious events, it does in fact establish that all past experiences play a constitutive role in every subsequent instance of phenomenal consciousness. These past experiences are not retained as memories in the ordinary sense but rather as impressions embedded within the temporal structure that makes presently occurring conscious experiences what they are. It is nevertheless the precise character of these embedded sense experiences, feelings, thoughts, and volitional impulses that conditions the character of any presently occurring psychological factors.

Sections 8.4 to 8.7 will address the question of how a conscious event, with its retained history, interacts with physical events. In particular it will suggest ways in which we might try to understand the relationship between the physical processes and the illuminating, retaining, and temporal structuring processes of consciousness. At this point the question of mental causation will be addressed and different options will be explored. It will be argued that it makes the most sense to assume that physical events are, by their very nature, responsive to conscious events. This provides the basis for a continuing relationship between the physical world and the stream of consciousness after

bodily death. Such a relationship, combined with the retention of feelings, thoughts, and desires within post-mortem consciousness, makes it plausible to suggest that such a stream of consciousness could eventually become re-embodied.

8.2 The Retention and Recollection of Experiences

In the previous chapter we explored how conscious experiences are of dynamic objects, objects that change constantly. This dynamism means that any phenomenon that appears within conscious experience is always already passing away even as it arises within awareness. Given this relentless flow, conscious experiences are only possible in virtue of mindfulness, the constant retention and immediate recollection of passing events, which is inseparable from any instance of conscious experience. To briefly recap, a dynamic conscious experience such as hearing birdsong requires that the immediately past phase of the birdsong sound is retained whilst the present sound is occurring. Without the retention of the immediate past, the present could not be experienced as flowing into the past. Given the *relentless* flow of events, there is no static present phase of a sound that arises in consciousness, remains unchanging for a time, and then departs.

Therefore, in order for the experience of a sound to be possible, the sound must be retained and recollected as a constitutive condition of the experience itself. Any phase of the experience of listening to birdsong is precisely *what it is* in virtue of the constantly growing history that develops due to the retention of passing events. This entails that any specific conscious experience is precisely the way it is because of a retained history of which the present is an always-new addition. If every instance of conscious experience must be followed by another instance of the same type, even after death, each new instance will presumably be an instance of conscious experience. Such experiences will be dynamic insofar as they are events and, as we explored in the previous chapter, all events are dynamic. Each new conscious experience would require a retained history for the experience to arise as the new addition to. Thus, each

new instance of conscious experience will arise immediately after the last, without any interruption and with mindfulness of its immediate past. This is what gives each instance of conscious experience a sense of subjective continuity with the previous instance. Whether during life, during the process of death, or during whatever occurs afterwards, the stream of conscious experience must retain an awareness of the immediate past in order that each instance amount to a conscious event.

For an example, let us look at the case of Clive Wearing, a musician, conductor and music producer who, in 1985, was 'struck down with one of the most extreme cases of amnesia ever recorded'.[2] The following is quoted from a feature in *The Guardian* written about his situation:

> A virus destroyed a part of his brain essential for memory. It's not only most of the past from before the illness that he can't recall. It's practically everything since then. Every conscious moment is like waking up for the first time. New information, as [Clive's wife] Deborah describes it, 'melts like snow, leaving not a trace'. The one part of his previous life that he does remember - when he was a sought-after conductor and classical music producer for Radio 3 - is Deborah. Every time he sees her again, even if she's only been out of the room to make a cup of tea, he'll greet her with a rapturous hug.[3]

If we were to uncritically accept the claim that, for Wearing, every conscious moment is 'like waking up for the first time', we would assume that his memory lasted for no longer than a single moment. This would leave Wearing incapable of doing anything other than spend a single moment trying to make sense of the world, and these attempts would have to be repeated in every moment. This would leave Wearing with no capacity to do anything accept try to make sense of a single moment. But this is not Wearing's situation. He is able to hold conversations, write in his journal, and play the piano. All of these activities require more than a single moment of experience. Despite his profound

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[2] Louise France, 'The Death of Yesterday', in *The Guardian,* 23rd January 2005, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/jan/23/biography.features3

[3] Ibid.

amnesia, Wearing remains able to experience the flow of time from one moment to the next. He therefore still has the capacity to retain and recollect moments *as they pass* even if this does not result in continuously developing autobiographical understanding.

In fact, the skills that Wearing has retained require more than even what short-term memory would provide. Wearing remembers how to talk, how to play the piano, how to write, and by extension, he remembers everything that one must remember in order to be able to maintain a conversation, play the piano, and write. At this point I do not wish to enter into discussions about the different types of memory, rather I wish to point out that, despite Wearing's profound amnesia regarding his own personal history and the history of the world around him, the most intimate memories to do with how he experiences the world and interacts with it seem to be well maintained. It is facts about himself and the world around him that Wearing seems to be unable to recollect. He does not know his own name or the name of his wife but be *does remember his wife.*

While Clive Wearing is described as falling in love with his wife every time he sees her, this does not seem like an entirely accurate description. Given that a love for his wife arises immediately and without fail upon seeing her again and again, it seems more accurate to say that Wearing *remembers* that he loves her every time they meet. He does, however, seem unable to *present* any memories of her to himself *as objects of vivid awareness*. And in this way Wearing's situation reveals an important distinction. This distinction is between the overt recollection of past events as objects of awareness and the retention of those events within the structure of consciousness. This distinction was elaborated by Edmund Husserl, and Dan Zahavi offers a clear account of it in *Husserl's Phenomenology:*

> If we compare the retention and the recollection, the first is an intuition, even if it is an intuition of something absent, something that has just existed. The recollection, in contrast, is a re-presenting *(vergegenwärtingende)* intentional act directed toward a completed past occurrence. Whereas the so-called retentional modification is a

> *passive* process which takes place without our active contribution, a recollection is an act which we can initiate ourselves.[4]

In this way, the distinction between retention and recollection is a difference between passive intuitions of what has gone before and an active re-presenting of complete past events.

Taking Clive Wearing's case as an example, I wish to suggest that cases of profound amnesia do not demand an interpretation in which events that were previously retained in consciousness are completely annihilated. Instead we can approach ordinary biographical memory as the active recollection of events that have been automatically and passively retained within the temporal structure of conscious experience itself. This structure influences the way in which the world in the present is experienced without being a focal object of present experience. When sitting in front of a piano, for example, the experience of the piano at the present time is shaped by previous encounters with the piano.

Retained experiences of the piano might influence and enhance our capacity to anticipate what will happen if we press different keys as well as our bodily experience of how we could move in order to produce a beautiful sound. But such retained experiences would not need to be recalled and re-presented as objects within present experience in order to have an influence. Wearing, for one, doesn't seem to need to vividly recall his previous experiences of playing a piano in order to recall how to play the piano. It seems that we can also desire to play a song and know that we can play it without recalling the song into vivid awareness beforehand.

In this way, retained experiences seem to become, over time, part of our habitual engagement with the world. Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, developing Husserl's work, recognised how past experiences and activities

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[4] Dan Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology,* Stanford University Press, 2003, p.83

become ‘sedimentations’ in what he called a ‘habit body’.[5] Such sedimentations are autonomous and anonymous in that we do not have to reflect on or think about them for their presence to influence the overall nature of our experience. These sedimentations are embedded within the fabric of our temporally structured, embodied experience of the world without us needing to notice or overtly recognise them. This is why the virus that damaged Wearing’s brain need not have altered the fact that each instance of his conscious experience involves sedimentations of past experiences in virtue of which he knows what a piano is and how to play it. These experiences may have been retained and become sedimentations that exert an influence later on without this influence being mediated by the vivid recollection of the experiences in question.

Of course, in most cases we *also* have the ability to vividly recollect these experiences and re-present past events as objects in the present. As we are playing the piano we might recall the first piano lesson we had or the first tune we ever played. But it might be this *additional* ability to re-present retained events, which have long since passed away, as objects of present awareness that depends upon certain brain processes. In Wearing’s case, damage to the brain structures that manage these processes might have left him unable to recollect experiences in the way that he used to. As a result, once an event has been retained and become embedded in the temporal structure of Wearing’s consciousness, it might play a constitutive role in his present experience without being re-presentable as an object. But whenever Clive is visited by his wife, the past experiences that he has retained of her are nonetheless able to condition the way that he experiences her in the present.

At this point it is worth recalling that one of the purposes of this chapter is to defend the *relevance* of rebirth by offering something of an account of how psychological traits and tendencies could persist after bodily death. If, when the brain is destroyed, every aspect of our personality ‘melts like snow, leaving not

[5] See Ted Toadvine, ‘Maurice Merleau-Ponty’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2018 Edition, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), 2018.

a trace', the prospects for any meaningful psychological continuity across lives would be thin on the ground.[6] The interpretation of Wearing's situation offered above will provide the basis for a more elaborate account in which meaningful psychological continuity across lives is possible.

Nevertheless, we can still question why anyone should be persuaded to adopt this interpretation rather than simply assuming that, without the physical brain, memories of the past disappear.

The answer lies in the fact that mindfulness, the process of retaining-recollection, which is inseparable from every instance of conscious experience, is not simply a matter of short-term storage in which only the immediate past is retained. Mindfulness actually requires the full history of the stream of conscious events to be embedded in the very nature of present experiences.

To understand how this is possible let us return to the example of birdsong. The experience of listening to birdsong involves more than a series of discrete tweets. Each tweet that passes is retained in awareness as the next tweet arises. This is what makes the twittering of birds possible as a conscious experience. Even when we have stopped actively listening to birdsong, this experience has become part of the structure of our ongoing awareness.

For example, the experience of listening to birdsong during a walk in the woods might flow into the experience of having a picnic in the woods, but the overall phenomenal quality of the picnic will be informed by the experiences that went before. Precisely what it was like to listen to birdsong while walking in the woods will be the recent historical backdrop of the picnic. Of course, unlike in the case of birdsong, retention of the past activity is not necessary for the experience of picnicking *in general* to be possible. To hear birdsong is to hear twittering birds, which is a sound constituted by tweets, which in turn must be retained in order to be heard *as* tweets. The latter parts of a tweet must be experienced along with the preceding parts in order to constitute a "tweet experience". In contrast,

[6] Louise France, 'The Death of Yesterday'.

picnicking is not constituted by parts that depend upon previous experiences of birdsong.

However, this contrast only holds in a *general* sense. In general, experiences of picnicking are possible without any prior experiences of listening to birdsong. One can experience picnicking having watched a football match or gone swimming. Listening to birdsong is not, in general, a prerequisite to picnicking because birdsong experiences are not necessarily constitutive of picnicking experiences. This contrasts with the way in which tweet experiences constitute the experience of birdsong. In general, it is not possible to experience birdsong without experiencing a tweet along with a prior experience of a tweet. And both the specific and general rules for birdsong experience are the same. In general, listening to a single tweet does not amount to listening to birdsong. In specific cases it is also not possible to experience birdsong without experiencing a procession of tweets.

But in the case of picnicking, the specifics matter a great deal. A specific conscious experience of picnicking has a particular phenomenal quality. This phenomenal quality is precisely “what it is like” to experience a particular episode of picnicking. An episode of picnicking is not generic, it will involve very particular experiential moments and phenomenal qualities relating to the thoughts, sensations, feelings, volitions and conceptualisations that constitute The Picnic that So-and-so had on Such-and-such Day. And “what it is like” for an individual to experience a specific picnic will be influenced by previous experiences. For example, there are likely to be a number of differences between “what it is like” to have a picnic having arrived by car and “what it is like” to have a picnic having just walked in the woods listening to birdsong.

Moreover, I wish to argue that the influence of previous experiences on the phenomenal quality of current experience goes beyond the overt psychological and physiological effects of previous events. The difference in “what it is like to be at a particular picnic” is not *entirely* a matter of physiological or psychological variations resulting from the different ways of arriving at the picnic.

Let us imagine two identical people in almost entirely parallel realities who arrive at exactly the same picnic via different means. One arrives by car, the other via woodland walk. Let us add that both people end up in exactly the same bodily states once they have arrived at the picnic despite the disparity in prior bodily activity. Let us also imagine that, once at the picnic, they are so engrossed in the wonderful food and company that they do not vividly recall any of the experiences associated with how they arrived. In this way, neither their bodily states nor their overt memories carry the impact of the journey.

Taking the above example, I wish to suggest that there will be a difference in "what it is like" for these two people to undergo the same picnicking experience despite neither engaging in vivid recollection of their journey beforehand and despite no disparity in their initial bodily sensations. This difference in phenomenal quality comes from the fact that "what it is like" for each individual to experience the picnic is partially constituted by impressions of previous activities even if these activities have neither left a lasting impact on their body nor been overtly recalled. In order to explore why this should be the case I will draw on Husserl's phenomenological account of temporal experience.

8.3 The Necessity of Retained Experiential History

Husserl's analysis of temporal experience begins with a recognition that there is an aspect of awareness that is, as Zahavi puts it, 'narrowly directed towards the now-phase of the object'.[7] This narrow awareness of an object's 'now-phase' results in what Husserl calls the 'primal impression' of the object.[8] But to speak of a *primal impression* or a *now-phase* of an experienced object is ultimately to abstract from the reality of experience. In reality, the *now-phase* of an object is never experienced on its own. Central to Husserl's phenomenology of time-consciousness is a recognition that any *primal impression* of an object

[7] Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology,* p.83.
[8] Ibid., p.83.

must be experienced along with a *retention* of the previous *primal impression* as well as a *protention* of the possible impressions that might follow.[9]

With this analysis in mind, we can recognise that any of the experiences involved in a particular picnic will involve a structure of retention, primal impression, and protention. But the most important feature for our argument is the continuous retention of past experiences. In the case of our two simultaneous picnickers, "what it is like" for them to taste a cucumber sandwich or feel the texture of a blanket is constituted in part by retained experiences. For any given "sandwich tasting" or "blanket-feeling" there will be a continuous flow of primal impressions along with constant retention of past impressions in virtue of which the whole experience is made possible. But this raises a question regarding how much needs to be retained for there to be a "sandwich tasting" or "blanket-feeling". How much of the primal impressions of the past must be retained in order for an experience of picnicking to be possible in the present?

To answer this question we can look closely at Husserl's analysis of how retention operates. He uses the example of hearing the musical notes C, D, E, and F, played in order. As each note is heard, it replaces the previous one as a primal impression. D replaces C as a primal impression but C is retained within the experience of D. Zahavi expands on this as follows:

> [W]hen E sounds, it replaces D in primal impression, while D is now retained by the retention. The retention, however, is not simply a consciousness of the tone that has just been. When C is succeeded by D, then our impressional consciousness of D is accompanied by a retention of C (Dc). When D is replaced by E, then our impressional consciousness of E is accompanied by a retention of D (Ed), but also by a retention of the tone which was retained in D (Ec).[10]

With the help of this analysis we can begin to see why the retention of past experience cannot simply amount to the retention of only *recent* experiences.

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[9] Ibid., p.83.
[10] Ibid., p.85

Our experience of E is accompanied, not just by a retention of D, but also by a retention of C, which was retained during D. E involves the retention of the previous experience, D, and through D it retains the experience of C. When F sounds, the experience will retain E, D, and C, with each prior note being embedded within the retention of the next. F, as a primal impression, is experienced with a retention of E, with which there is a retention of D, with which there is a retention of C. The result is a retained experience of C, embedded within a retained experience of D, embedded within a retained experience of E, embedded within the experience in which F is a primal impression.

What's more, if we hear the musical notes C, D, E, and F, there will have been experiences prior to hearing the C sound. Hopefully the arguments in previous chapters have given us good reason to doubt that the note C could appear as an initial, unprecedented moment of experience. When the C note is the primal impression it is experienced with a retention of the immediately prior impression. Let us call this impression “C minus 1” (C-1). C-1 could be an impression of auditory silence, or a visual impression that caught our eye before the music began. Whatever the specific phenomenal quality of C-1, as a primal impression it will have been accompanied by a retention of the previous primal impression. We can call *this* prior impression C-2. When the C note is the primal impression it is experienced with a retention of C-1, and embedded within this retained impression will be the retention of C-2. And these deeper layers of embedded retentions presumably reach back through the C-3 embedded in C-2 to the retained impressions of C-4, C-5, C-6, and so on into an entire retained history.

Of course, at this point it might be claimed that there is no need for the depth of retentions embedded within an instance of conscious experience to be limitless. While the structure of experience may well be as Husserl describes it, this structure might only have the capacity to retain so many past impressions. We could, for example, imagine that the capacity for retention extends only as far as several seconds into the past. In this case, when the notes C, D, E, and F are played quite slowly, by the time the F sounds there might be no retention of the C note. The experience of the F sounding would include a retention of

the E note, which would retain the D note. But the D that is embedded within the retention of E no longer has a retention of C embedded within it. And when the silence that follows the F note comes, the D will no longer be retained within the retention of F that also contains E within it. In this way, as time moves on, new primal impressions would push out the oldest remaining retentions.

Such an account could work if impressions were discrete constituents of temporal experience with independent characters. Being discrete in this way, impressions could appear as primal impressions, remain for a time as retained impressions, and ultimately disappear, without this impacting on the temporal character of more recent impressions. But if this were the case, there would be no grounds for thinking that a retained impression would contain within it a retention of a previous impression. If the impressions that constitute the experience of an E note sounding are all discrete, there is no basis for suggesting that the primal impressions of the E note retain the impressions of the D note. It may be true that our experience of the E note also involves retentions of the D note and the C note but these would just be additional impressions. The E note impressions would be just the same if there were no retentions of D or C.

However, impressions can only be completely distinct from one another if they do not reflect the dynamic, flowing nature of the events that they are impressions *of.* A dynamic impression flows from previous impressions and onward to new impressions *in virtue of being an impression of reality's dynamic flow.* This dynamism precludes the possibility of impressions having independent characters from one another. If, on the other hand, impressions are *not* dynamic, we are left with an account in which temporal experience is constituted by static impressions. Such static impression could do little more than represent abstract points within the flow of time. In this case, our experience of objects as constantly flowing would be something that is constantly reconstructed within the structure of consciousness as a *mere representation* of time passing.

Chapter Seven explored the problems with this representational anti-realist approach. To reiterate, if temporal experience were constructed out of

impressions as discrete temporal points, any given moment of conscious experience would be experienced as having a distinct end-point. When listening to music we would experience a distinct and inert "absolute very-latest impression to arise in consciousness". This is not what our experience of music is like. We do not experience the present moment as the stopping-point in a line of impressions but rather as a relentless onflow of impressions. This experiential onflow involves constantly experiencing new impressions, which immediately recede into the retained past, making way for yet-newer impressions.[11]

Ultimately, if there is a point that divides the past from the future, this point moves relentlessly onward, without stopping for even the briefest of moments. And insofar as consciousness "illuminates" the fundamentally unfolding nature of reality, the impressions that it retains must mirror this ever-moving point. In order to result in genuinely dynamic experiences, consciousness must retain the very unfolding that makes an event the sort of thing that it is. But to retain the unfolding of an event involves more than simply producing a discrete representation of an abstract moment taken from the flow of events. It does not work to posit discrete impressions that are captured during a discrete moment in time. Instead, impressions must be a thick swathe of retained experience in which the present moment is simply an abstract origin point from which the whole of experience is constantly renewed. In this way, an account of temporal experience in which old retained impressions can separate from others and completely disappear fails to appreciate what an impression actually is.

We can demonstrate this by returning to the example of the musical notes sounding. The experience of hearing the D note consists of impressions that originate in the now-phase of the temporal structure and immediately become part of a retained history. When impressions have just arisen in the now-phase,

[11] As previously mentioned, the full range and seriousness of the problems facing this kind of representational anti-realist approach to temporal experience are dealt with in much greater depth in Barry Dainton, *Stream of Consciousness: Unity and continuity in conscious experience,* London, New York, Routledge, 2010, pp.113-182.

they can be called *primal* impressions. But a primal impression of the D note is not a discrete impression of a static moment. There is no static point in time when a particular impression of the D note sounding is the *absolute very-latest impression to arise in consciousness*. An impression flows through the temporal structure of experience, and does so constantly, leaving no time to inertly "be" in a definitive "position" in the temporal structure. This would misrepresent the temporal structure of experience as being, at a fundamental level, non-dynamic. And insofar as the experience of a D note sounding is a dynamic temporal experience it is *a seamlessly flowing stream of impressions*. Every impression of the D note sounding is *always flowing* through the temporal structure of consciousness, from the origin point that is the now-phase and into retained history. And this movement results in the unavoidable intersection of what we might mistakenly take to be discrete impressions.

In order to recognise this intersection, we must appreciate that a genuinely temporal experience of something like the D note sounding requires an awareness that the phase of the sound that is immediately present is *already receding* into the immediate past. This recession of present sound into the immediate past requires the *simultaneous arrival* of a new impression of the immediate present. This awareness of a new impression arriving is the onflow from one experience to the next that causes impressions to intersect or overlap.

To illustrate this point, consider a particular impression of the D note sounding and call it "D(i)". D(i) is an event that extends across time. This temporal extension is necessary in order for the sound to be experienced as receding from the present and into the past, being replaced by a new impression of the present. When we recognise that a particular impression of the D note sounding is extended in this way, we must also recognise that it therefore overlaps with the adjacent impressions of the D note sounding. To hear the D note sounding is to hear a particular impression, D(i), give way to a new impression, which we can call D(ii). But D(ii) is no less flowing and so no less extended that D(i). The impression D(ii) begins during impression D(i) and continues until it has receded into the immediate past, having been replaced by D(iii). So too does the impression D(iii) begin during the impression D(ii) and end during D(iv).

Each of these impressions of the D note sounding overlap with one another until the D note stops sounding and the E note begins. In this case an impression such as D(v), which begins within D(iv), ends when it has receded and been replaced as present experience by a pause in the music. The impression of this pause begins during D(v) and ends once it has been replaced by the newly arriving E(i). And impressions of the E note sounding continue to overlap from here.[12]

Using this analysis we can say that the true impressions that constitute our temporal experience transform from being primal impressions to being retained impressions in the very process of occurring as impressions. Each impression begins as the new arrival that displaces a previous impression and ends by being displaced by another new arrival. This means that any impression includes *within itself* the retention of the impression that it replaces. Without this retained predecessor, the impression would not be *of having replaced a previous impression.* And without this feature, an impression cannot be an impression of a dynamic, flowing event such as a musical note sounding.

Impressions of temporal objects are only possible so long as they overlap with impressions of temporally adjacent phases of the object. This overlap is preserved as long as each successive impression retains within itself the previous impression. The impression D(ii) is an impression of a particular phase of the D note sounding only so long as it is an impression of D(i) receding and giving way to D(ii). This is what that particular phase of the D note sounding consisted in. Without any retention of D(i), the impression D(ii) is no longer an impression of that phase of the D note sounding. Without any retention of D(i), the impression D(ii) ceases to be part of the seamless flow of temporal experience. In this case, any retained experience of the D note sounding would lose *both* D(i) *and* D(ii) as constituent impressions. And the complete absence of D(i) *and* D(ii) from the temporal structure of experience would cause

[12] For a detailed exploration of the way in which temporal experiences overlap, see Dainton, *Stream of Consciousness*, 2010, pp.162-182.

impression D(iii) to collapse just as D(ii) would if it lost retention of D(i). And this collapse would have a knock-on effect on every impression retained within the temporal structure of consciousness.

Therefore, we can return to the claim that began this tangent and say the following: If, as the F note sounds, retention of the C note sounding is lost, the whole structure of retained impressions would collapse. It is retained impressions that make temporal experiences such as those of an F note sounding possible. This is why there could be no experience of the F note sounding if retained impressions of the C note sounding were lost. And this is not only true of the experience of the F note sounding. Nor is it only true of our experiences of music or sound. The entirety of dynamic conscious experience is structured in such a way that impressions of the present depend upon the retention of their predecessors. Each impression that arises within conscious experience and is retained depends on the prior impression with which it overlaps in order for it to be the particular impression that it is.

To summarise, the reality of conscious experience consists of phenomenal awareness of the flow of events, which includes impressions of a now-phase that *flow seamless into being impressions of the retained past,* as well as protention of potential futures. A primal impression cannot be part of this seamless flow of conscious experience on its own. A primal impression must intersect and overlap with a preceding impression insofar as it arises as that preceding impression recedes. This intersection means that there is no phenomenal quality to a primal impression that can be separated from the phenomenal quality of its predecessor. There is nothing that "it is like" to experience a primal impression on its own because a primal impression is an impression of a now-phase arising *as another recedes.* "What it is like" for the previous now-phase to recede is part and parcel of "what it is like" for the new now-phase to arise. Ultimately, the phenomenal quality of a conscious experience or "what it is like" consists of the *movement* of primal impressions into retained impressions and their *simultaneous* replacement by new primal impressions. If we begin with Husserl's account, as well as our own experience, and develop it in the light of an appreciation for the seamless flow of experience,

we can conclude that the overlap between primal and retained impressions is integral to their appearance as part of a conscious experience.

Furthermore, by developing Husserl's initial insights in this way we can begin to entertain certain possibilities that he himself did not anticipate. Insofar as a dynamic experience is a seamless flow of impressions, it is the phenomenal quality of these impressions that determines the phenomenal quality of the dynamic experience. And the phenomenal quality of each impression intersects with the phenomenal quality of its predecessor. This means that the phenomenal quality of a primal impression will be different if there is a difference in any of the impressions that preceded it. For any dynamic experience, its phenomenal quality is determined primarily by the primal impression. But the phenomenal quality of the primal impression is determined, in part, by the phenomenal quality of its predecessor, the phenomenal quality of which is partially determined by the impression before. And this partial determination of phenomenal quality stretches all the way back into the history of the stream of conscious experience. And, in the light of this significant development of Husserl's account, we can now answer our earlier question regarding the identical picnickers and how much needs to be retained for there to be a "sandwich tasting" or "blanket-feeling".

Insofar as they are constituted by seamlessly flowing impressions, the phenomenal quality of experiences such as "sandwich tasting" and "blanket-feeling" are dependent upon a history of embedded impressions. If they arrived via different means, our two identical picnickers would have different experiences of an identical picnic. This is because the impressions that constitute these present experiences would have, embedded within them, impressions of past experience. Even if they do not actively recollect their journey nor undergo different bodily sensations as a result of their different journeys, these journeys resulted in impressions that have become embedded constituent factors that now partially determine what it is like for them to be having the picnic. The impressions of birdsong that one of these picnickers had during their woodland walk are now embedded within their impressions of eating a sandwich or feeling their hand resting on a blanket. These impressions

of the picnic overlap with their predecessors in a way that requires each impression to have its predecessor embedded within it. What it *was* like for our picnicker to hear birdsong on a woodland walk played a role in determining what it *was* like for them to arrive at the picnic, which *now* plays a role in determining what the rest of the picnic will be like for them *in future*. In this way, the phenomenal quality of a specific experience of picnicking can indeed be constituted, in part, by the phenomenal quality of an experience of listening to birdsong.

At this point it is worth clarifying that the picnicker who arrived via woodland walk does not continue to vividly experience birdsong even as they enjoy their picnic. For the phenomenal quality of listening to birdsong to partially constitute the phenomenal quality of the picnic experience *does not require the continual vivid presence of the birdsong experience*. In the case of the picnicker, impressions of birdsong have transformed and become constitutive factors that are embedded in the presently occurring impressions of picnicking. Insofar as their role in the structure of experience has changed, the past impressions of birdsong do not continue to appear as they did when they were primal impressions. This is why there is a sense in which old experiences *fade* away.

However, this *fading* is not akin to the way in which a sound reverberates, dissipates, and ultimately disappears completely. To explore why, we can return to Husserl's insights into the nature of experience. In his analysis of how retentions are experienced, Husserl is very clear in pointing out that a retained experience is nothing like a reverberation or an echo. A loud sound is not retained as a weaker sound that rings in the background of our auditory awareness.[13] Husserl explores these differences as follows:

> When a sound dies away, it is first sensed with particular fullness (intensity), and thereupon comes to an end in a sudden reduction of intensity. The sound is still there, is still sensed, but in mere reverberation. This real sensation of sound should be distinguished

[13] Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, trans. J. S. Churchill, Indiana University Press, 1964, p.53.

> from the tonal moment in retention. The retentional sound is not actually present but "primarily remembered" precisely in the now. It is not really on hand in retentional consciousness. The tonal moment that belongs to this consciousness, however, cannot be another sound which is really on hand, not even a very weak one which is qualitatively similar (like an echo). A present sound can indeed remind us of a past sound, present it, symbolize it; this, however, already presupposes another representation of the past.[14]

Given that a retained sound is *not* like a reverberation, it would be a mistake to imagine that past impressions might disappear as an echo does.

Elsewhere, Husserl describes the movement of a sound into deeper retention as being a process of receding or vanishing 'into the remoteness of consciousness'.[15] And yet, as it is vanishing, moving further from the ever-new 'generative now', the 'sound itself is the same, but "in the way that" it appears, the sound is continually different'.[16] Here Husserl is pointing out that *retained impressions continue to be the same* even as their position within the temporal structure of consciousness changes. It is unclear how far into the depths of consciousness Husserl thought that impressions would be maintained in this way. But regardless of Husserl's own view, in the light of points made just previously we have reason to believe that there is no point where an impression could completely disappear during its journey into the depths of the temporal structure without compromising the integrity of the whole structure.

For an impression to lose the preceding impressions that are embedded within it would not be consistent with the seamless flow of our experience. Our impressions of the immediate present recede seamlessly into the past, which means that primal impressions move seamlessly into retained impressions. For this to be possible, any particular primal impression must continue to play a role in conscious experience even as it moves away from the 'generative now' where it began. The retained impressions that make a particular impression *what it is* must likewise continue to play a constitutive role in that impression

[14] Ibid., p.53.
[15] Ibid., p.45.
[16] Ibid., p.45.

even as it too becomes a merely retained impression. As we have seen, if older retained impressions were completely lost, the temporal structure in which new impressions are embedded would collapse also. This is why, when an impression of the now-phase becomes a retained impression, the impressions that are embedded within it must persist also. Such deeply embedded impressions can be considered to have *faded* when compared to a retained impression just as a retained impression can be said to have *faded* when compared to a presently occurring impression.

Nevertheless, while we can say that impressions fade as they move through the temporal structure of consciousness, this is only in the sense that they have become deeply embedded within the temporal structure that makes dynamic experiences possible. Just as Merleau-Ponty recognised that past experiences and activities become sedimentations embedded within our habitual embodied engagement with the world, so too can we recognise that retained impressions become sedimentations embedded within the temporal structure of our conscious experience.

In this way, impressions do not disappear, rather they become *temporal sedimentations*, embedded features of the temporal structure in virtue of which vivid impressions of the now-phase are what they are. By first being retained and then becoming *sedimented* within the temporal structure of consciousness, past impressions become constitutive features of those impressions that succeed them. The birdsong experience does not remain as a discrete experience alongside the picnic experience. Rather it becomes a sedimented feature of the temporal structure of the picnicking experience itself. It is precisely because they are embedded within the deep structure of present experience that past experiences make a difference to the phenomenal quality of conscious experience in the present. This is how different ways of arriving at a picnic make a difference to the phenomenal quality of the picnic experience itself, even without the active recollections or physiological changes that might come from these different ways of arriving.

Furthermore, this is also how past experiences continue to influence and shape our feelings, intentions, and reactions in the present. In the case of our two

picnickers, differences in the phenomenal quality of the picnic experience will likely influence how they respond to their companions and to events around them. If, for example, the picnicker who drove to the picnic was caught in a traffic jam on the way, they might have become deeply frustrated by the sound of car horns. This impression of frustration at car horns sounding will be embedded within successive impressions, becoming likewise a constitutive factor in the experiences that follow. Upon hearing a car horn from the nearby car park, our picnicker might feel a frustration that is deepened by the fact that embedded within its structure is a duplicate frustration at the same object. The picnicker who walked to the picnic will lack this embedded frustration and so feel a shallower version of it.

This might also be how we could understand Clive Wearing's continued ability to play the piano or his reaction to seeing Deborah, the wife that he does not overtly remember. Years' worth of embedded impressions of playing the piano might have deepened and enriched the phenomenal quality of sitting in front of a piano to such a degree that it enables him to play the piano without overt memories of how to do it. The embedded impressions in question would have once been felt sensations of playing the piano and perhaps the feelings of elation and competence that come from consistently performing well. As we have seen, these past experiences will have become both habitually and temporally *sedimented,* playing a constitutive role in the phenomenal quality of every subsequent experience, including experiences of pianos. Insofar as these past experiences will have included an awareness that it was a *piano* that was being played, Wearing's embodied experience of the present will involve sedimented impressions of playing a piano well. Despite his severe condition, when sitting in front of a piano Wearing's primal impressions of the large wooden artefact will have, as constitutive features, sedimented impressions of playing something just like it with love and competence.[17]

[17] Insofar as we might still wish to call this sort of sedimented impression "memory" it is somewhat akin to the phenomenon of 'Rilkean Memory' discussed by Mark

Similarly, a lifetime's worth of sedimented impressions of love for his wife may influence the way that she appears to him, even when he cannot recall who exactly she is. Despite his condition, Wearing's primal impressions of his wife's features, her voice, the way she moves, the shape of her face, will nonetheless have, as constitutive factors, deeply embedded impressions of these same features, accompanied by great affection. This affection may well influence his experience of her in the present while the precise details of her name, history, and relationship to him remain buried. This could be due to labels and facts not being as important to the phenomenal quality of an experience as a feeling like affection. Using my own case as an example, "what it is like" to know someone's name seems to play a very minor role in "what it is like" to spend time with them. This is in contrast to "what it is like" to feel strong affection towards them, which plays a major role in the phenomenal quality of time spent in their company. Insofar as the phenomenal quality of an impression that has become sedimented influences the quality of impressions in the present, it makes sense that factors that have a weak impact on the overall phenomenal quality of the experience that they originally arose as part of will have a weak impact on future impressions also.

For these reasons it is not necessary to assume that Clive Wearing's past experiences were completely annihilated when his brain was severely damaged. Nor do we need to assume that, without the physical brain, experiences of the past disappear. If we accept that consciousness of genuinely dynamic events requires that past impressions are embedded within all subsequent ones, it follows that Clive Wearing, along with any other being that is phenomenally conscious of the genuine flow of time, retains their experiential history as sedimentations within the temporal structure of their presently occurring experiences. To be phenomenally conscious of time in the way that you and I are phenomenally conscious of time, a being must have the kind of

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Rowlands. See Mark Rowlands, 'Rilkean Memory', *The Southern Journal of Philosophy,* Vol. 53. Spindel Supplement, 2015.

stream of conscious instances that includes either retained or sedimented impressions from all previous experiences.

And in order for us to the take the traditional Buddhist belief in rebirth seriously, it must be the case that *all* previous experiences leave a lasting impression within the structure of consciousness. This, or some equivalent account, must be the case in order for the traditional Buddhist belief in rebirth to play a meaningful role in Buddhist practice. As we shall see in the next section, there are two claims coming from the Buddhist tradition that depend on an account in which the history of the consciousness stream is retained or at least sedimented in some form. The first of these is the claim that the Buddha exemplifies the results of multiple lifetimes of mental cultivation. The mental states cultivated in one lifetime must become embedded in successive instances of the same mind-stream in order for such a claim to be taken seriously. The second of these claims is that adept meditators, such as the Buddha, are able to recall memories from past lives. Like the first, this claim is only plausible if impressions from past experiences can survive in some form within the ongoing consciousness.

8.4 Retaining and Embedding Experiences across Lifetimes

As we have seen, the temporal structure of conscious experience must have, embedded within it, a history of impressions or otherwise collapse altogether. And the necessity of this embedded history can be tied in with our previous arguments to the effect that phenomenal consciousness must always arise with reflexivity, retention, and temporal structure or otherwise be impossible. Insofar as conscious experience always involves an awareness of overlapping temporal events unfolding, there cannot be conscious experience without a temporal structure to make this possible. This temporal structure must have, embedded within it, the entire history of conscious experience in order to maintain the structure of genuinely temporal events. This structure consists of overlapping impressions in which prior impressions are embedded within the structure of their successors. At no point in the depths of this temporal structure

can there be an embedded impression with nothing embedded within it. Such an “empty” impression would lack any temporality and so could not play a role in the temporal structure of experience. This is why any instance of conscious experience that arises must have, embedded within it, all previous instances within its own stream.

We have also seen that there are good reasons to assume that neither conception nor birth is the point at which conscious experience brutally emerges from non-conscious factors. These reasons likewise support the view that death is not the point at which the stream of illuminating, history-retaining-and-embedding, reflexive awareness brutally transforms into completely different non-conscious factors. Therefore, insofar as a particular stream of conscious experience persists after bodily death, each successive surviving instance of conscious experience must have the history of prior impressions embedded within it. This is how the experiences from even the most distant past lives could remain as constitutive features of present experience, shaping the phenomenal quality of sounds, smells, sensations, feelings, volitions, and thoughts.

If we then consider our present life, we can assume that our current thoughts, volitions, feelings, and sensory experiences will become constitutive features of future instances of conscious experience. If we cultivate a particular set of attitudes or mental dispositions in this life, our experience of the world in this life will be shaped by those attitudes. So if our past relationships to others have been permeated by a sense of indifference or causal cruelty, this experience of others will become sedimented and influence “what it is like” for us to relate to others in the present. Our experience of distance or contempt for the feelings of others will be deepened by the fact that such experiences have, embedded within them, sedimented impressions of the same attitude of distance or contempt. But these sedimented attitudes will not simply disappear when this life ends. The impressions of callousness, compassion, insight, or hatred, which are sedimented within the structure of consciousness, will continue to shape the quality of all future experiences within the ongoing stream.

Using this account we can support the claim that the Buddha was extraordinarily compassionate due to lifetimes of practice. If the Buddha had previously spent countless lifetimes returning again and again to mind training practices that develop compassion and wisdom, so many instances of these qualities will have become embedded within his mind-stream that they will have come to suffuse the Buddha's consciousness and character. This would put the Buddha in the optimal position to teach the way out of suffering.

This account could also explain how rebirth connects to the path of practice taught by the Buddha. Insofar as mindfulness arises uninterruptedly with every instance in a stream of conscious experience, every effort that is made to cultivate wholesome mental qualities will result in retained and then sedimented impressions, embedded within the temporal structure of conscious experience, which will continue to influence future experiences. If feelings of trust and hope are frequently aroused when practising or listening to Buddhist teachings, many layers of impressions of these feelings and their association with the Buddhist path will become sedimented within the structure of consciousness. This will deepen future experiences of such trust in Buddhist teachings and practice. It could then be possible that, in a future life, one encounters Buddhist teachings and has a reaction in which there is a deep undercurrent of trust and hope. One may then choose to listen to such teachings and adopt Buddhist practices again in that future life. In this way, a practitioner can engage in multiple lifetimes of deepening mind-training without overtly recollecting practice in previous lives.

Of course, an account that takes past experiences to be embedded within the structure of consciousness itself, rather than stored in the brain, must address the evidence suggesting that there are integral brain processes that are responsible for our capacity to recall past experiences when needed.

The role of the brain in the overt recollection of experiences can be dealt with by approaching the regions of the brain associated with memory as being required for the *triggering* rather than *production* of remembered experiences. Insofar as impressions fade into the deep structure of consciousness, vividly recollecting the past might only be possible in virtue of specific brain processes that operate as shortcuts to particular deeply embedded impressions. As

already mentioned, the capacity to "re-present" past events as objects of present awareness is distinct from the intrinsic capacity of consciousness to retain passing events.[18] Given that the temporal structure of consciousness operates with the thick present as the focus of attention, there must be additional factors that enable us to cut across this linear structure and facilitate the re-presentation of relevant embedded experiences. Without such factors, important information and experiences would be left buried in the depths of the temporal structure of consciousness.

In cases of profound amnesia, such as Clive Wearing's, we can understand them as a loss of the ability to re-present embedded impressions as part of vivid awareness in a way that makes knowledge of his own biography or his wife's name possible. This re-presentational ability might have been possible in virtue of particular neurophysiological processes that were capable of triggering recollection of those past experiences at the appropriate times. Due to the damage caused by the illness, these neurophysiological processes no longer trigger past experiences, leaving Wearing with a reliable memory that lasts only a few seconds. And yet, in Wearing's case, his immediate affectionate response to his wife might be due to fact that his past experiences, including his love for her, have become sedimented and remain constitutive features of his conscious experience despite the fact that their recollection is no longer forthcoming. In this way we can see how it need not necessarily follow from cases of amnesia and brain damage that past experiences are stored in the brain itself.

However, another common claim coming from Buddhist meditation literature is that advanced meditators are capable of recalling the events of past lives. If recollection depends upon certain brain functions we might wonder if these claims are plausible. The issue of whether or not there is a conflict here ultimately comes down to whether recollection of a past life memory requires the *past life brain.* Recollections of past lives are probably not possible if the recollection of deeply embedded impressions requires the *same brain* as the

[18] Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology*, p.83.

one associated with the instance of consciousness that retained the impression in the first place. But it seems fair to assume that, so long as the correct brain processes are in play, these processes are able to facilitate recollections from the *entire* deep history of consciousness. Unless a one-to-one connection is required between each particular neuron and each particular recollected experience it could be that simply having a fully functioning brain is enough for deeply embedded impressions to be dredged up under the right conditions.

As an example we can consider an advanced meditation practitioner who is purposefully trying to recall the experience of past lives. This practitioner would have a functioning brain and so would have the neurological processes required to recollect events from their own past and to attend purposefully to them. With a moderately refined attention it is possible to repeatedly recollect a retained impression at will. This is a basic mindfulness practice that is quite easy to try. We can, for example, recall a specific experience from our past and maintain our attention on it until it becomes quite stable. If we now consider the case of a practitioner with a highly refined attention, they might be able to go one step further. Such a practitioner could move their attention from their retained impression of a past experience onto those experiences that overlap with it. In this case they could take one experience and move their refined attention to an earlier experience. With sufficient attentional refinement, such a practitioner might be able to move their attention back through their retained history of impressions to their more deeply embedded, temporally sedimented history of impressions.[19] And given the seamless overlap of impressions there seems to be no reason why this practice of backward-moving recollection would have to stop at a specific point. Our imagined practitioner could use their powers of recollection and concentration, which are only possible due to certain brain processes, in order to dredge up experiences embedded deep within their

[19] This type of meditation practice is described in manuals such as Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga,* Chapter XIII, Verses 22-24, trans. Bhikkhu Nanamoli, Buddhist Publication Society, 2011, p. 406.

temporally structured consciousness, including experiences from any past lives.

However, insofar as we take memory processes in the brain to enable vivid recollections of experiences embedded within the temporal structure of consciousness, there must be a basis for the interaction between the physical processes of the brain and the structure of consciousness. In order to understand the basis of such interaction we must take a step back and consider the precise relationship between physical processes and the illuminating, history-retaining-and-embedding process of phenomenal consciousness.

So far we have come to two important conclusions. Firstly, each instance of phenomenal consciousness must always be preceded and followed by another instance of phenomenal consciousness. Secondly, phenomenal consciousness always arises with an inseparable temporal structure in which impressions from the entire history of the consciousness stream have become embedded. Independent of these conclusions I take it to be part of common understanding that every brain process arises from more basic *non*-brain processes and eventually collapses back into these. If brain processes were a necessary condition for the existence of (a) phenomenal consciousness, (b) its temporal structure, or (c) its continuous retention of conscious experiences, it would follow that either (a), (b), or (c) would cease to exist without brain processes. But this would contradict our first and second conclusions. This is why we have taken the view that the unbroken stream of phenomenal consciousness and its constantly retaining-embedding temporal structure does not depend for its existence on continuous brain processes.

And yet, certain brain processes are clearly necessary in order for us to be able to recollect past experiences in a way that makes certain experiences and cognitive abilities possible. This is the motivation for spending the following section suggesting ways to account for this dependence. Such suggestions will gesture towards ways in which we might be able to maintain that the stream of phenomenal consciousness persists unbroken across lifetimes, with embedded sedimentations from historical impressions conditioning present experience, whilst also depending upon certain brain processes in order to reliably and

vividly recollect much of its embedded history. These suggestions are not attempts to present a full account of how the consequences of this argument for the plausibility of rebirth can be made to fit with existing neuroscientific evidence. Instead, I will attempt to point to those features of the account of phenomenal consciousness presented so far that could enable a fuller account to be developed. Hopefully this will be enough to prevent doubts about the compatibility of current neuroscientific evidence with what has been said so far from undermining the overall argument for the plausibility of Buddhist belief in rebirth.

8.5 Brain Processes and the Stream of Consciousness

When it comes to considering the relationship between instances of phenomenal consciousness and instances of physicality it is important to reiterate a point that has been made in previous chapters: despite being distinct from other factors, phenomenal consciousness is not separate from them. We have explored reasons for believing that an instance of phenomenally conscious experience cannot arise without there being a prior instance with the same basic characteristics. But this does not mean that such instances exist as isolated mental substances. Each instance of conscious experience must be conditioned by other factors, which will include the factors that constitute the physical body and world.

Although the structure of consciousness constitutes much of “what it is like” to experience sounds, sensations, and such like, this cannot be the whole story. The physical energies that constitute the processes of brain, body, and world must *also* play a role in constituting what these experiences are if we are to assume that there are actually physical processes behind sounds, sensations, and other objects of consciousness. Insofar as phenomenal consciousness is defined in terms of its illuminating character, its object-directedness gives it an in-built relationship with the other factors of reality, which it illuminates and retains. This is why it is not difficult to understand how an instance of conscious experience comes to be conditioned by physical factors. Given that those

physical factors are the objects of consciousness, they play a role in determining what a particular conscious experience is.

But it seems as if there are also physical processes that condition consciousness *without appearing as constituents of conscious experience*. Cases such as Clive Wearing's suggest that there are *unexperienced* brain processes that play a key role in conscious experience. Brain processes that are responsible for the recollection of events, information, and so on do not appear as vivid features of experience and yet, if they are damaged or destroyed, recollection is severely curtailed. It seems as if there must be a way for physical processes to condition a conscious experience without entering into the configuration that *is* that conscious experience.

Such a conclusion is not, however, necessary. We have already spent some time exploring how experiential events become embedded within the temporal structure of consciousness. These embedded sedimentations go on to influence the phenomenal quality of future experiences without being overt features of those experiences. This means that there are features of conscious experience that do not need to be overt, vivid, or easily noticeable in order to influence or otherwise condition that conscious experience. A possible mechanism for the way in which neurological events influence conscious events might be via features that are embedded within the deeper structure of consciousness in this way. When past experiences are recollected, this return of deeply embedded sedimentations into present experience might be triggered by events within this deeper structure. Experiential events at this deeper level might mirror, or even be partially constituted by, events within the brain and body. In this way, the physical processes that trigger recollections could perform this function in virtue of being fundamentally inseparable from deeper structural features of conscious experience. These deeper structural features would respond to the brain processes associated with memory in such a way that the recollection of specific experiences is triggered.

In order to motivate this idea of "deeper structural features of consciousness" I would like to highlight two different ways in which something can be a feature of phenomenally conscious experience. Firstly we have those features that

appear at, or close to, the *focus of conscious attention*. Secondly we have those features that remain at the *periphery of consciousness*, playing a role in the overall quality of a phenomenally conscious experience but without being central to it. That consciousness is a field with a focus and a fringe was recognised by William James. In *A Pluralistic Universe,* James described these aspects as follows:

> My present field of consciousness is a centre surrounded by a fringe that shades insensibly into a subconscious more. I use three separate terms here to describe this fact; but I might as well use three hundred, for the fact is all shades and no boundaries. Which part of it properly is in my consciousness, which out? If I name what is out, it already has come in. The centre works in one way while the margins work in another, and presently overpower the centre and are central themselves. What we conceptually identify ourselves with and say we are thinking of at any time is the centre; but our *full* self is the whole field, with all those indefinitely radiating subconscious possibilities of increase that we can only feel without conceiving, and can hardly begin to analyse.[20]

According to James, consciousness is roughly structured into a centre, a fringe, and a 'subconscious more'. Here the 'subconscious more' seems to refer to something like the deepest depths of the structure of consciousness. While we can consider each of these aspects of consciousness to be constituent features of the overall structure, none of them can be separated from the others. Alongside inseparability, there is also an unbroken continuity between that which is at the centre of an instance of conscious experience and that which is at the fringe. Likewise there is an unbroken continuity between the fringe and the deeper structure.

An example of this structure can be found when we look at Gestalt images such as Figure-Ground visual illusions. These illusions involve an image that can appear as at least two different objects depending on the visual focus of the observer. Perhaps the most famous image is the Rubin Faces-Vase figure: a

[20] William James, *A Pluralistic Universe,* Harvard University Press, 1977, p.103.

vase, which can also appear as two faces in profile, looking at one another.[21] If the observer focusses on the vase, the faces become the background for the appearance of the vase. If the observer focusses on the faces, the vase becomes the background for the appearance of the faces. In both cases the visual phenomenal qualities of both faces and vase appear as part of the experience but they might appear as the fringe of the central experience.

The centre of the experience, be it the faces or the vase, comprises the overt, vivid object of the experience.[22] We will usually have no problem recognising that we are phenomenally conscious of such central objects. In this respect, objects at the centre of a conscious experience are very much both phenomenally conscious and *access conscious,* where access consciousness refers to an object's 'availability for use in reasoning and rationally guiding speech and action'.[23]

Contrastingly, the fringe of the experience comprises those features and processes that are implicit, forming the background of the experience. In the case of phenomena at the fringe of experience it is difficult to offer a clear account of "what it is like" to experience them. This difficulty exists in virtue of the nature of the fringe itself. As James points out, if our awareness of features at the fringe of conscious experience was crisp and clear, those features would not be at the fringe at all. Insofar as there are processes and features of conscious experience that operate at its fringes, it is difficult to say whether we

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[21] For an image of this illusion, see section 3.4 of Eric Schwitzgebel, 'Introspection', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Winter 2016 Edition, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), 2016.

[22] It is worth pointing out that while the centre of conscious attention seems to be capable of apprehending multiple objects, the claim coming from most Abhidharma systems would be that this centre of experience is not the focal point of attention. For the Abhidharmikas there must be a focal point, even to *this* centre, a small region of single-pointed attention that illuminates only one object at a time with the *most* acute degree of awareness.

[23] Ned Block, 'On a confusion about a function of consciousness', *Behavioural and brain sciences*, Vol. 18, 1995, p.227.

are *access conscious* of them. They may certainly impact how we think and behave, but our awareness of them seems at best implicit.

As an illustration of this distinction between the centre and fringe of experience, let us consider subtle sensations like the feeling of the ground under one's feet. Such sensations arise frequently as constituent features of a conscious experience whilst rarely being the focus of conscious attention. But being peripheral to conscious attention does not mean that such sensations are completely absent from conscious experience. If I were to walk to the shops whilst thinking about what I need to buy, there would be an implicit expectation that I constantly feel the ground beneath my feet. Were the ground to disappear I would receive an immense shock, but I would only receive this shock in virtue of *feeling the absence of the ground*. Such a shock at feeling this *absence* of ground involves experiencing the rapid loss of an immediately prior feeling of the *presence* of the ground. Therefore, *feeling the presence of the ground* must have been a feature of the prior conscious experience of walking to the shops.

Furthermore, if we only became consciously aware of something when our full attention was on it, our experience of the world would be incredibly choppy in that each new object would appear as if from nowhere whenever we paid attention to it. There must be peripheral impressions of fringe objects, such as the ground beneath us, which we can go on to pay attention to. Insofar as I am phenomenally conscious of the ground beneath my feet, these impressions are at the fringe of my conscious experience rather than being phenomena that I am aware of *in the sense of paying attention to them*. And given that they are at the fringe of my consciousness, it is only through the fact that these impressions of the ground are entailed by the central experience of walking that we can clarify that they are indeed there at the fringe of consciousness.

It is this fringe that James claims 'shades insensibly' into the depths of consciousness. But while we can gesture towards what is going on at the centre of conscious experience in order to suggest the existence of certain features at the fringe, this is not a method for exhaustively examining the entire fringe of conscious experience, let alone the deeper structure. There may well be

phenomena arising at the fringes or in the depths of conscious experience that cannot simply be inferred from phenomena at the vivid centre.

This suggests that, if we are looking for a site where myriad interactions could plausibly take place between processes within the physical body and processes within the structure of phenomenal consciousness, the fringes and depths of conscious experience may well be that site. This would help to explain why experiences that have become embedded sedimentations within the temporal structure of consciousness, rather than the physical structure of the brain, nonetheless require certain brain processes in order to move from the deep fringes of consciousness to its centre. Processes within the brain may be responsible for organising or enabling certain processes within the deep structure of conscious experience, which in turn trigger the return of sedimented experiences into vivid awareness. This could explain why recollection cannot happen without the correct brain processes despite the retention, embedding, and recollection of experiences occurring entirely within the structure of conscious experience.

All in all, three things are being suggested here. Firstly, I am suggesting that there are deep structural features that are part and parcel of the constitution of our phenomenally conscious experiences. These features include those that occupy the fringe of consciousness as well as those features that occupy the deepest structure of consciousness. Such features constitute “what it is like” to have a phenomenally conscious experience just as my fringe awareness of the ground beneath my feet is part of “what it is like” to walk to the shops.

Secondly, I am suggesting that some of these features might be inseparable from, and in a mutually influential relationship with, physical events in our bodies and brains. To put this in terms that refer to the Abhidharma principles used already: any instance within the stream of our conscious experience is an indivisible cluster that includes an unbroken continuum of central, fringe, and deep structural features where some of these features are inseparably configured with physical factors that constitute our body and brain. Putting these two suggestions together, I am suggesting that “what it is like” to have a phenomenally conscious experience, such as seeing a familiar face, includes

features at the very fringe of the experience. These fringe features contribute to the phenomenal quality of the experience while also being inseparable from, and responsive to, the physical factors that comprise certain brain processes.

As an illustration of what is being suggested, consider the way in which “what it is like” to walk to the shops includes a range of phenomenal qualities. These include phenomenal qualities associated with my feet touching the ground, wind on my face, the smell of the air, and so on. Some of these phenomenal qualities are easy to notice and reference when using walking to the shops as an example, others are not so obvious. There will be sensations in my body and thoughts going through my mind that I did not notice when I walked to the shops and do not remember now. These were nonetheless aspects of the experience that were occurring at the fringe of consciousness. There may likewise be sensations that never get noticed simply because they are so basic or so ubiquitous that it is never relevant to place our attention on them. Such sensations might be embedded deep within experiences, despite being varied and complex. These are the sorts of deep fringe features that might be inseparable from physical processes in the body and brain.

The third suggestion being made is that it is the relationship between central and fringe features of conscious experience that determines whether or not sedimented impressions return to the centre and so are recollected. Putting this third suggestion together with the previous two, I am suggesting that if the brain processes required for memory or recognition were to cease functioning, the fringe features with which they are inseparable would be altered in such a way that they would no longer trigger the return of sedimented impressions required for an instance of recollection or recognition.

Overall, this allows us to explain why physical brain processes are necessary for cognitive abilities such as recollection whilst avoiding positing a one-way triggering relationship in which the physical simply “makes things happen” within consciousness in a brute manner. In such a relationship, consciousness would be a passive recipient of physical powers rather than a member of an inseparable cluster of mutually conditioning mental and physical factors. To approach mental-physical causation in a way that is consistent with

Abhidharma principles involves approaching conscious events and physical events as inseparable *as well as mutually conditioning*. At the same time, we can maintain that this inseparability is most pronounced in the deeper structure of conscious experience. This allows us to posit a thoroughgoing inseparability between conscious experience and the physical factors that constitute neuronal events without this entailing that the vast array of intricate events going on in our brains ever appear anywhere near the centre of our conscious attention.

To illustrate how this might work, let us imagine a person recalling the name of their cat. There are experiences that constitute "what it is like" to know that a cat is called Boots: the sound of the name, how it is written, how it feels to say "Boots", as well as the name's conceptual and personal significance. These phenomenally qualitied experiences arise together in the experience of knowing that Boots is called "Boots". Nevertheless, each experiential feature of this "knowing" will arise at varying "distances" from the centre of consciousness depending on the situation. For example, how it feels to pronounce the name "Boots" is closely tied to the embodied capacity to call out to the cat. The act of calling out to Boots involves a clear recollection of "what it feels like" to perform the act of pronouncing his name.

Furthermore, it is quite possible that, embedded within the experience of hearing, saying, reading, and comprehending a name, are a vast array of deep fringe experiences that always arise in a cluster with certain neuronal events. Insofar as these fringe experiences are inseparable from physical processes in the brain, their role and structure within consciousness will have developed in tandem with that of the brain. This role and structure will alter as the brain changes.

In this way, particular types of deep fringe experience could have developed alongside the brain processes involved in language use. For example, my understanding of language might depend, in part, on my recollecting the different ways that a word such as "Boots" or "Cat" can be used. These recollections would remain at the fringe of experience but near enough the centre of attention that I would not need to vividly attend to every single instance in which the words could be used. Rather, I would have a general sense of the

word's possible uses in virtue of the fact that specific instances of word-use would remain in the "near fringe", heavily informing the overall character of the conscious experience. In this way the world would appear as a world of word and language possibilities. This experience of linguistic possibilities would be maintained by the presence of certain "near fringe" features of experience. These "near fringe" features would include, not only recollections of word use, but also deeper features that keep those recollections close enough to the centre of awareness that they can be informative. Such deeper linguistic features will have arisen with and been closely associated with the use of words and language throughout this lifetime.

When it comes to knowing that Boots is called "Boots", such specific instances of language ability might involve specific brain processes. These brain processes will have developed alongside features within the depths of consciousness with which they form a cluster of inseparable mental and physical factors. We might imagine that, throughout my life, the experience of spoken language, initially as used by my parents, might have triggered certain brain and body processes that were inseparable from modifications in the deep structure of consciousness. There might have been "something it was like" to hear speech, as opposed to any other type of sound, in virtue of distinctive features at the fringe of such experiences, which arose in tandem with certain physical process in my nervous system.

Such distinctive linguistic features of experiences could have developed in complexity as I grew older until I had an ability to use and embody language. As a result, every experience that I have had relating to Boots the Cat might have involved linguistic features within their deep structure that are part of "what it feels like" to comprehend that my cat is called Boots. Insofar as these deep structural features have arisen repeatedly with all "Boots the Cat experiences", they might effectively tie such experiences together. With this deep structural tie in place, when I see a cat with a distinctive black mask and white boots, it

would result in a cascade of associated sedimented impressions being dredged up.[24]

But this deep structural tie would exist in virtue of the linguistic features of experience, which condition my perspective on the world. Were specific processes within my brain to collapse, the distinctive linguistic experiences that enabled me to use language might likewise collapse and the world of words and language would recede infuriatingly into the depths of consciousness. In such a situation, the "near fringe" of my experience would become devoid of the relevant recollections of how I use the name "Boots", especially its association with the cat in front of me. I would be left unable to name the cat, perhaps not even recalling that I know the cat, or that it even is a cat. This would be despite the fact that all of the impressions involved in fully comprehending that this is my good friend Boots would be embedded in the deep structure of my consciousness.

This has been a mere illustration of how it might be possible to account for the development and loss of cognitive abilities within a framework in which the fundamental structures of consciousness do not depend on the structures of the brain. This illustration explains how, within this framework, there can also be structures and features of conscious experience that *do* depend for their existence on certain brain processes. It is these sorts of structures and features that might be the basis for the ability to recollect and make use of past experience in a way that enables key cognitive capacities. If, due to brain damage or death, certain structures within consciousness collapse, conscious experience will be reduced to an attenuated form. But this form will still include

[24] In order to develop this sort of account further one might be able to make use of "field theories" of consciousness aside from James' such as the one provided by Gestalt theorist Aron Gurwitsch. See Aron Gurwitsch, *Field of Consciousness,* Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1964. See also P. Sven Arvidson, 'The Field of Consciousness: James and Gurwitsch', *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, Vol. 28, No. 4, Fall, 1992, pp.833-856.

the basic structures that constitute an ongoing stream of conscious experience that has a sedimented experiential history.

Nevertheless, whilst we can now comprehend how conscious experiences might be conditioned and enabled by physical processes, this relationship must go both ways. Physical processes must, in turn, be conditioned by conscious events in order for conscious experiences *as conscious experiences* to have an influence on what goes on in the physical world. Such a two-way relationship would not only explain how the tandem development of the brain and consciousness has been so harmonious, it would also offer a basis for understanding how a stream of consciousness might be reborn with a new physical body. This is why the final section of this chapter will explore the relationship between consciousness and physical reality as a whole.

8.6 Physical Reality and the Stream of Consciousness

In order for phenomenally conscious experiences *as phenomenally conscious experiences* to have an influence on what goes on in the physical world, physical events must be conditioned by phenomenally conscious events. Given that discussions regarding the precise nature of “what it feels like” to exist take place in the physical media of printed journals and audible conversations we can only assume that the phenomenal quality of experience influences physical events. And yet, precisely *how* the phenomenal quality of experience conditions physical events is difficult to ascertain. When investigating influences in the opposite direction we benefit from the fact that the conditioning of conscious experience is evident within experience itself. We know the physical through its impact on our experiences.

However, the primacy of conscious experience makes an investigation into the nature of the physical itself highly problematic. If physical events are of the nature to be conditioned in certain ways by conscious events, we do not have direct access to this nature. Instead we must simply begin with what we do know, which is that conscious events influence the course of physical events. But as soon as we assume that there is two-way influence between the

conscious aspects of reality and the non-conscious physical features of reality we raise deep questions regarding where and when this influence takes place. The widespread assumption that physical reality is causally closed is generally taken to rule out the possibility that something that is not a constituent of the physical universe could play an influential role in its unfolding.[25] The assumption is that the physical sciences are too successful at predicting events for their models of the universe to have erroneously missed out an important factor such as phenomenal consciousness.[26] This is what motivates the argument that phenomenal consciousness is epiphenomenal, having no influence on physical events.

Nevertheless, we do not need to assume that the predictions of scientific models are inexplicably successful given their failure to include phenomenal consciousness. We can understand how conscious events could influence physical events without this implying that the physical sciences have excluded a fundamental factor from their models. To begin with, we can schematise the relationship between the physical and phenomenal consciousness in terms of a number of possible realities. In order to understand these possible realities we can first conceive of two different kinds of phenomenal consciousness: "Z-Consciousness" and "X-Consciousness". We can also think of two different kinds of physical reality: the "Z-Physical" and the "X-Physical".

The Z-Physical is a closed system, which is unresponsive to the phenomenally conscious character of anything. The X-Physical is responsive to and influenced by phenomenally conscious events. Z-Consciousness is conscious only of itself and therefore involves a subjective experience of its own nature and nothing else. I will assume that such a subjective experience would be constant and invariant. X-Consciousness, on the other hand, is conscious of objects in the world, namely physical events.

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[25] See John Heil, *Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction*, New York, Routledge, 2013, pp.26,29,30,42.

[26] This assumption is used against traditional Buddhist claims by Owen Flanagan. See *The Bodhisattva's Brain: Buddhism Naturalized*, MIT Press, 2011, p.2.

We can now enumerate a number of possible worlds:

Reality A consists of Z-Consciousness and Z-Physical events. Z-Consciousness experiences only itself and Z-Physical events are not responsive to this Z-Conscious experience.

Reality B consists of X-Consciousness and the X-Physical. X-Consciousness involves phenomenal awareness of physical objects and the X-Physical world responds to the conscious experiences that result from this.

Reality C consists of X-Consciousness and the Z-Physical. This X-Consciousness involves phenomenal awareness of Z-Physical objects but the Z-Physical world is causally closed to all such phenomenally conscious experiences so they have no impact on Z-Physical events.

Reality D consists of Z-Consciousness and the X-Physical. Z-Consciousness experiences only itself but the X-Physical is responsive to this basic experience in some way. Insofar as the subjective experience associated with Z-Consciousness illuminating only itself would be unvarying, any influence that this experience had on the X-Physical would be equally unchanging. While *Reality D* might be different in constitution from *Reality A*, there would be little practical difference as neither would involve the physical responding to *changes* in consciousness. Z-Consciousness would involve a single continuous experience of itself and so would never have any interesting influence on wider reality.

We can now ask which reality we exist in. Due to our direct acquaintance with phenomenal consciousness we can recognise immediately that we are aware of more than simply the nature of consciousness itself. We experience a range of dynamic factors with distinct characteristics. We also frequently distinguish between a given object and our awareness of it. If this direct acquaintance is genuine it tells us that our consciousness is X-Consciousness and *not* Z-Consciousness. This means that our reality cannot be Reality A or Reality D. What remains are Realities B and C. The difference here is whether the physical is responsive to phenomenal consciousness or not.

As already mentioned, we are able to discuss phenomenal consciousness, which means we are able to engage in physical behaviours and produce utterances that are only meaningful because they are the result of our being phenomenally conscious. If our talk about phenomenal consciousness is not the result of our being phenomenally conscious, it would be deeply odd that an explanation in which it *is* the result of our being phenomenally conscious works so well. If such consciousness were generated by a physical process that also causes our talk about being phenomenally conscious, we would be faced with an unfathomable mystery as to where all the talk about the specific features and character of phenomenal consciousness comes from. Our physical speech capacities seem to be capable of forming utterances that, to our own satisfaction, successfully communicate something of the subjective character of our experiences. Therefore, it certainly seems as if our physical bodies are responsive to our conscious experiences *as phenomenally conscious experiences.* Our subjectivity seems to be quite evident in the way that we conduct ourselves through the physical world. If we can take this evidence seriously it seems fair to reject the idea that we live in the physically unresponsive Reality C. If there is phenomenal consciousness of physical objects and the physical world is responsive to this phenomenal consciousness, we must exist in Reality B.

At this point we can ask whether this means that physical reality is not causally closed. If it is not causally closed, we can then ask how the physical sciences have not stumbled upon a gap in their explanatory power where phenomenal consciousness should be.

The answer to these questions lies in another distinction we can make *within* Reality B. If the physical responds to certain conscious experiences at certain times but at other times unfolds in its own way, it follows that our reality involves what we could call the “Y-Physical”. The Y-Physical is such that, under specific circumstances, it responds to phenomenal consciousness, behaving like the X-Physical. But when these circumstances are not in place the Y-Physical operates as its own unfolding process, unresponsive to phenomenally conscious events, much like the Z-Physical does. In this case Reality B would

be something closer to *Reality AB*, a reality in which there is an independently unfolding physical universe that is occasionally affected by phenomenally conscious events. If we exist in Reality AB we would expect the physical sciences to eventually encounter some serious anomalies around conscious behaviour in which the natural unfolding of physical events seems to be interfered with by an unknown force. That no such anomalies have been encountered counts against the idea that we exist in Reality AB.

The alternative is that we exist in *Reality B proper*, which involves pure X-Physical events that respond constantly and continuously to X-Conscious events. In this case there is no unfolding of the physical universe that is unresponsive to phenomenally conscious events. If we exist in full-blown Reality B, our scientific understanding of the physical universe already unwittingly includes or otherwise "factors-in" the responsiveness of physical events to phenomenally conscious events. The physical laws that have been formulated are based on calculations and observations of a reality that continuously responds to phenomenal consciousness.

In this case, the influence that human or non-human consciousness has on the physical universe would not be some additional force. Rather, the way in which physical forces operate would already be a response to consciousness. This close and continuous relationship between phenomenally conscious events and physical events would make it very hard to distinguish a phenomenally conscious event from a physical event *from the outside*. Both types of event would arise in response to the other. Consciousness of physical events would arise in response to those physical events arising just as physical events would arise in response to conscious events arising. If this relationship between the physical and the conscious is at the fundamental level of reality, the physical sciences would have to reach a fundamental degree of accuracy before they noticed that physical events were responding to something not-entirely-physical.

If we assume that we exist in Reality B, there will not be some specific region of the brain where conscious events have their special influence. Rather, just as every physical event is conditioned by other features of the physical universe

such as space and time, so too will they be conditioned by the features of phenomenal consciousness. To take the example of a conversation about the phenomenal quality of consciousness, it would *not* be the case that, upon our deciding to talk about consciousness, previously independent physical processes are interfered with by some supernatural power of consciousness. Rather, the phenomenal quality of consciousness will have been continually influencing physical events such that those events have never arisen as independent processes. Any study of neurological or biological processes will have already observed the influence of phenomenal consciousness. The reason why no unusual causal influences will have been noticed is because there are no independent, influence-free physical phenomena to compare neurological or biological processes to. If we exist in Reality B, even the most fundamental physical processes that constitute chemical, biological, and neurological processes are conditioned by conscious events.

Of course, one could scientifically ascertain whether or not our reality is Reality B by achieving a completed physics. In such a complete physics, every fundamental physical phenomenon would belong to a predictable class of physical entities and every complex physical phenomenon would be exhaustively accounted for and its behaviour predicted purely in terms of these fundamental physical entities. In this case every physical event would have a known set of exhaustive physical causes and conditions, leaving no room for anything but prior physical events. I am confident that physics has not reached this point. But even if it were to do so, we would still be faced either with anomalies at the points where conscious events *as phenomenally conscious events* influenced fundamental physical events or otherwise with the most unfathomable coincidence in the history of humanity: it would seem as if phenomenal consciousness has an influence on the world when, in fact, it does not.

If we now return to the question of memory and psychological development across lives, we begin to see how the brain processes that are responsible for triggering the recollection of specific sedimented impressions might be capable of doing so. If all physical events are conditioned by conscious events, the

neuro-physical events that constitute our brain processes will be likewise responsive to and conditioned by ongoing conscious events. The precise ways in which neurological events and conscious events condition one another are beyond the scope of this investigation but attempts have been made to suggest more detailed theories.[27]

Nevertheless, we could assume that, through this mutual conditioning, the structure of a particular brain and the structure of a particular consciousness would come to mirror one another such that the stimulation of one produces a response in the other. If this were the case, sedimented impressions of the past would be mirrored by neurological features that, when operative, would trigger, stimulate, or otherwise "reawaken" those sedimented impressions such that the spotlight of vivid attention would fall on them, resulting in recollection of past experience *as past experience.* And it would be through the triggering of sedimented impressions that the synergy of neuro-physical and conscious processes would amount to the full range of capacities that humans and other sentient organisms possess.

Furthermore, this synergy would exist in some form at every level of reality. It would not be the case that the only physical processes that respond to conscious processes are those occurring in the nervous system. Rather, *every* physical process would be responsive in its own way to the conscious events within *every* stream of consciousness, *whether these are configured with a functioning body or not.*

However, insofar as we have suggested that every physical event is conditioned by and responsive to conscious events, we run the risk of giving the impression that every neuro-physical event is conditioned equally by every conscious experience. This would entail that every brain and nervous system was equally responsive to the conscious experiences of every subject, which is not the case. My brain and body consistently respond to the set of conscious

[27] For a selection of such theories see *Contemporary Dualism: A Defence*, edited by Andrea Lavazza and Howard Robinson, New York, Routledge, 2014.

experiences that I call my own, just as the bodies of others seem to respond to *their* conscious experiences.

Despite the general responsiveness of physical events to conscious events, there seems to be a privileged relationship between the particular physical events in a given nervous system and a particular stream of conscious events. This state of affairs is mirrored by the fact that, at least in my own case, my conscious experiences are only *of* a small set of physical events rather than every single physical event. The physical events that constitute the vivid centre and near fringe of my experience might be most heavily conditioned by my conscious experiences. Likewise, the physical events that constitute the vivid centre and near fringe of another's experience might be the most heavily conditioned by their own conscious experiences. But as we move away from the centre of conscious experience and into the deep fringe we might find that the conditioning relationship between physical events and a particular stream of conscious events becomes less privileged. Where physical events do not constitute or condition any vivid, central experiences, these events might be conditioned by and responsive to all conscious events more or less equally.

This idea of a particular conscious subject being privileged with regard to certain events goes back at least as far as Descartes and has been recently defended by Richard Swinburne.[28] But I wish to additionally suggest that the privileged access that a conscious subject has to certain events is mirrored by a *privileged influence* that the conscious subject's experiences have on those events. Furthermore, following something of William James' logic, I wish to suggest that both forms of privilege, access and influence, are a matter of degree. One conscious subject's privileged access and influence 'shades' into

[28] See Richard Swinburne, *Mind, Brain, and Free Will*, Oxford University Press, 2013. And, of course, see René Descartes, *Meditations,* trans. Desmond M. Clarke, London, Penguin Books, 2000.

a non-privileged background, which ‘shades’ into another subject’s privileged access and influence.[29]

That said, if we were to try and detect these varying degrees of privileged relationship we might have to take into account the likelihood that, as physical processes become increasingly complex, they become increasingly constitutive of vivid experience. We presumably find vivid, complex conscious experiences in complex organisms rather than in rocks or particles. This is why we cannot simply compare two similar physical systems and hope to find evidence of consciousness via differences in the type of behaviour that these systems exhibit. If both systems consist of the basic physical processes that we find in particles or molecules, both would behave in similar ways insofar as neither would respond to or be conditioned by a specific stream of conscious experience.

On the other hand, if both systems involved complex neurological processes, it would be the case that both would be responding to a different stream of conscious experience. In order to tell the difference between the general responsiveness to conscious events and the specific responsiveness to a single stream, every feature of the neurological processes would have to be accounted for in terms of the homogenous behaviour of more basic physical processes. In this case, any additional behaviours that result from a particular stream of consciousness, rather than from the general behaviour of all physical events, could be noticed. This is why a fully reductive physical account of living organisms is required in order to rule out the possibility that we live in Reality B. Until such an account is provided, the evidence from our own conscious experiences and the responsiveness of our bodies suggests that physical reality is engaged in an ongoing mutually conditioning relationship with our particular stream of conscious events.

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[29] James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, p.103.

Furthermore, insofar as we accept that death does not bring an end to a stream of conscious experience, we can also surmise that death does not bring an end to the mutually conditioning relationship between events in a conscious stream and physical events in the body and world. The dysfunction and decay of the physical body would be mirrored by the collapse of certain conscious capacities but this would not amount to an annihilation of the stream of conscious experience. If the process of illuminating and retaining events in the world cannot decompose into further factors, this process will continue to operate in the absence of certain physiological processes. Nor would the dysfunction, decay, and death of the body lead to the processes of consciousness transcending any relationship with the physical world. If the relationship between physical and conscious processes is part of their mutually conditioning nature, this nature will not radically change simply because certain complex synergetic processes have collapsed into more basic ones.

8.7 Conclusion: And In That Sleep of Death What *Desires* May Come

Without certain body and brain functions, the complex variety of capacities made possible by the mutual conditioning of conscious events and neuro-physical events would be lost. But the process of illuminating, retaining, and temporally structuring events would not cease. Conscious experiences would continue to arise albeit with a severely attenuated capacity to recollect past experiences in a co-ordinated manner. Without the predictability provided by an organised nervous system, sedimented impressions would trigger purely in dependence upon the whims of conscious attention. And the objects of conscious attention will no longer be provided by organised sensory input. The precise scope for possible conscious experiences after death is vast once we accept that a given stream of conscious events must continue even without a functioning nervous system.

However, this scope is not so vast that we could expect the complete annihilation of all of our psychological features. Given that the temporal structure, in which past experiences are embedded, is an inseparable feature

of consciousness, death would not bring about the automatic cessation of all desires, impulses, urges, and so forth. While easy access to the objects of our desires might be lost when the body dies, every instance of the desiring will have involved impressions becoming sedimented within the structure of conscious experience. Like Clive Wearing and his feelings for his wife, our strongest feelings will be embedded within the ongoing stream of conscious experience, where they will influence and shape any reactions to what appears. In this respect, although all sensory and many intellectual objects would no longer arise within consciousness, the *desire* for such objects to arise might still occur.

Furthermore, the majority of desires are intimately tied to an *embodied* experience of the world. Most of the time, if not all of the time, to desire involves a bodily urge for something that is not the case to be the case. And the satisfaction of these urges is as closely tied to the felt body as the urges themselves. The urge to bite into a bar of chocolate is satisfied by the biting. Without a bar of chocolate, the urge is frustrating and demands satisfaction. This urge can recur again and again, pushing us to find a bar of chocolate and take that satisfying bite.

But let us imagine if we no longer even experienced a body capable of finding and biting into a bar of chocolate. If we accept that past experiences have become embedded impressions within the structure of conscious experience itself, it follows that the full range of past urges will have become embedded in the same way. Even as the body becomes incapable of moving, biting, seeing, hearing, even thinking coherently, the capacities associated with conscious experience will become severely attenuated. But the urges and desires embedded within the stream of conscious experience itself will remain. The desire to take a bite of a chocolate bar will remain even if neither biting nor tasting is possible. As mentioned already, without a bar of chocolate, the urge for one is frustrating. But without a body capable of even comprehending what this urge is, let alone acting to satisfy it, the frustration involved would be intense. Even if it remained only at the fringe of whatever conscious experience

arose during or after death, the intensity of such frustration at losing our embodied experience must be a powerful influence.

Moreover, as already suggested, instances of phenomenally conscious experiences elicit a response from physical events. Most importantly, those physical factors that are inseparable from deep structural features of consciousness could quite plausibly be responsive to sedimented desires and the intense frustration that they could become within a disembodied stream of consciousness. And frustration of this kind would be felt for every bodily urge that had not been exhausted or transformed into something else. The sheer magnitude of having bodily desires but no body capable of satisfying them would produce an anguish akin to that associated with the most profound bodily paralysis.

However, in cases of paralysis, the sensory faculties continue to function and so provide a range of sensory objects. Conscious attention, in these cases, is continually drawn towards visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory or olfactory objects. These objects are presumably constituted in part by the physical processes of the body. In contrast, conscious experience after bodily death would not have access to these kinds of organised sensory objects. Therefore, conscious attention would not be continually drawn to objects constituted by physical processes *within the body*. But consciousness of physical events would not simply cease. The processes of consciousness would continue to constitute experience out of events in the world such that, in the absence of sensory processing, conscious attention would be drawn towards something else. And given the powerful anguish at being bereft of embodiment that, in most cases, would be conditioning every moment of conscious experience after death, we can easily imagine that conscious attention would be drawn towards the kind of sensory-motor processes that constitute the sort of embodied experiences that most of us so sorely crave.

Insofar as we accept that, at their deepest level, conscious processes and physical processes are inseparable and mutually conditioning, there are a variety of ways in which we might imagine the post-mortem state to play out. Given the intense desires that are sedimented within the deep structure of

phenomenal consciousness, along with the mutually conditioning relationship between this deep structure and physical reality, it would follow that the physical world would still be an available object of attention as well as influence for a post-mortem instance of phenomenal consciousness.

Traditional Buddhist cosmology has much to say on the subtle operations as well as the possible destinations of a post-mortem consciousness and it is beyond the scope of this project to investigate them. It is not even considered inevitable, within this cosmology, that a consciousness stream will be reborn in anything that resembles a physical body as we commonly understand it. For this reason it would not help the case for the traditional Buddhist belief in rebirth for us to spend much more time exploring precisely what happens to a given stream of phenomenal consciousness after bodily death.

Needless to say, we know that in each of our own cases phenomenal consciousness has arisen with a physical body at least once already. If we also accept that our stream of phenomenal consciousness is not the sort of thing that begins or ceases to exist, the simplest conclusion we could draw would be that our embodiment is one instance in a repeating pattern of lives. To assume that embodiment is an unrepeatable fluke would be to assume that something is going on now that is unprecedented. And, as we have seen in previous chapters, appeals to unprecedented factors risk positing instances of brute causation or emergence, which present the world as ultimately unintelligible. The simple, sober option is actually to assume that the unbroken stream of consciousness is reborn.

9. Conclusion

This project began with a recognition that the adoption of mindfulness into clinical and secular self-help contexts has been aided by attempts to modernise Buddhism, which have marginalised the role of traditional Buddhist cosmology in an attempt to align with the attitudes of a modern, broadly secular, audience. Implicit within this marginalisation of the traditional cosmology, and especially the central role of rebirth, is the assumption that a modern audience has no reason to take Buddhist cosmology seriously. In response to this assumption I have presented the case for the plausibility of rebirth as an afterlife possibility that modern audiences have reasons to take seriously.

Chapter Two explored the key principles for an argument for rebirth that would be recognised and supported by the earliest Buddhist philosophers. It was argued that, despite the historical debates that took place between the adherents of different early Buddhist philosophical Abhidharma systems, common principles can be found. This led to the isolation of three principles that were common to many of the Abhidharma systems. These principles are the Chariot, Cluster, and Continuity Principles. It was shown that these principles were used within the earliest known argument for rebirth made by Buddhist philosopher Dharmakīrti.

Chapter Three provided an overview of the relevant literature within contemporary philosophy and Buddhist scholarship that deal with rebirth and the potential afterlife of consciousness. We found that an increased interest in Buddhist philosophy has not been accompanied by a deeper engagement with Buddhist claims about the afterlife. This is despite the fact that, as was addressed in the chapter, the question of whether consciousness survives death depends upon increasingly contested assumptions about the nature of consciousness.

In Chapter Four we explored how consciousness is understood within traditional Buddhist philosophy, with particular regard to Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth. This argument relies on two key premises: (1)

Consciousness is distinct from other phenomena, particularly physical phenomena. (2) An instance of consciousness must be preceded by a cause with the same intrinsic nature. During this exploration it became clear that, insofar as Dharmakīrti was influenced by early Abhidharma systems such as the Sarvāstivāda, his view that consciousness is a fundamentally distinct phenomenon would have been complemented by the view that consciousness is inseparable from other factors and connected, through them, to the rest of reality. By exploring the Chariot and Cluster principles adhered to by Abhidharma philosophers, we looked at some of the reasons for considering consciousness to be a distinct feature of reality whilst also recognising its intrinsic connectedness to other phenomena.

In this fourth chapter it also became clear that, within Buddhist philosophy, consciousness is a fundamental method of acquiring knowledge. In particular, direct conscious experience is the only way to come to know the intrinsic nature of the fundamental constituents of reality, the *dharmas*. The limitation here is that consciousness may not be able to know the intrinsic nature of objects that lie beyond consciousness. This limitation is mirrored by the fact that the empirical methods of objective observation used in the sciences cannot gain direct access to consciousness. This is because any given consciousness is only known reflexively, by its own intrinsic self-awareness. While consciousness and the intrinsic natures that appear to it can only be known by consciousness, the empirical sciences that provide information about our physical world and neurophysiology cannot access consciousness.

Chapter Five showed how arguments in support of panpsychism, particularly those presented by Galen Strawson, can also support the second premise of Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth. Philosophers such as Russell, Strawson, Robinson, and Pereboom have shown how physics offers a purely mathematical, causal, and structural vision of reality and so cannot be taken as an exhaustive account of the world. In contrast, conscious experience involves phenomenal qualities that cannot be defined purely in terms of relationships with other phenomena. Strawson goes on to argue that to suggest that the defining qualities found in conscious experience emerge from factors devoid of

these qualities would be to posit a *brute* form of emergence. Emergence is brute when there is a jump during the emergence process from one set of qualities or properties to a completely different set. If we introduce qualitative jumps during the emergence process, emergent properties will be completely unprecedented and their emergence will be unintelligible. Similar reasons were offered for rejecting brute causation. If we reject brute emergence and brute causation, the definitive qualities of conscious experience can only have arisen from factors that have an intrinsic nature that explains the arising of these qualities.

We also found that the only way that consciousness could arise from factors that are intrinsically devoid of consciousness would be if conscious experience could be analysed into distinctive characteristics, none of which involves consciousness. But conscious experience does not seem to be amenable to such an analysis. Each aspect of consciousness seems to involve consciousness and, when it comes to phenomenally conscious experience, *seeming is being.* This is why it was concluded that there are good reasons to accept the second premise of Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth. Among the causes of consciousness there must be factors that share in the characteristics of consciousness.

In Chapter Six we challenged Strawson's *constitutive* panpsychist claim that individual conscious subjects can merge to form a single, more complex conscious subject. It was argued that consciousness is the unified phenomenal perspective from which certain objects or phenomenal qualities appear. It is a single point of view on objects or qualities. To move from there being multiple instances of phenomenal consciousness to a single instance is simply to have annihilated all but one instance of phenomenal consciousness. To suggest the annihilation of instances of phenomenal consciousness would be to appeal to brute emergence or causation. Strawson's claim also entails that a complex subject can collapse into many subjects, which would involve the brute creation of new conscious subjects. Insofar as it accepts the unintelligible, brute appearance and disappearance of phenomena, the constitutive panpsychist position is untenable. By ruling out the annihilation and brute creation of

conscious subjects we concluded that the subject of each conscious experience must arise in dependence upon a single prior conscious subject. With each singular conscious subject giving rise to or "becoming" another with each new instance of conscious experience, there would be an unbroken continuum of individual conscious subjects. Barring brute annihilation, this unbroken continuum will persist regardless of bodily death.

Chapter Seven argued that phenomenal consciousness is inseparable from the temporal structure in virtue of which there is awareness of dynamic phenomena. This argument was connected to the further argument that the fundamental phenomena that constitute reality are best understood as activities rather than as inert states. This entails that every instance of conscious awareness must be awareness of active, dynamic phenomena. This is why *all* instances in the stream of phenomenal consciousness must arise with instances of retaining-recollection in which the immediate past is retained along with the present. Each instance of conscious experience is likewise dynamic, being part of an unbroken stream of subjective experiences in which the subject of one experience becomes the subject of the next without gaps or breaks. This further strengthens Dharmakīrti's overall argument for the unbroken continuity of conscious events.

In the first part of Chapter Eight we explored how the retaining temporal structure of phenomenal consciousness must have, embedded within it, sedimentations of the past impressions that have arisen within the stream of conscious events. These sedimented impressions are not retained as memory but rather as embedded features of the ongoing structure of consciousness, which influence the precise quality of presently occurring conscious experience. It is nevertheless the precise character of the sedimented impressions from sense experiences, feelings, thoughts, and volitional impulses that conditions the character of any presently occurring psychological factors.

The second part of Chapter Eight addressed the question of how a conscious event, with its embedded sedimentations of retained impressions, interacts with physical events. Ways were suggested as to how we might try to understand the relationship between the physical processes and the illuminating, retaining,

embedding, temporal structuring processes of consciousness. The question of how mental causation might work was approached with reference to Abhidharma principles and by making use of William James' distinction between the centre and the fringe of conscious experience. It was suggested that mental-physical interaction might take place between inseparable and mutually conditioning physical and mental factors, where these mental factors exist within the deep fringe of conscious experience. Reasons for considering this possibility were presented as well as a more general argument for the view that physical reality is generally responsive to phenomenally conscious events, even after death.

Overall, each chapter of this project has built towards the following argument: Any view that considers a stream of conscious experience to arise from non-conscious factors is committed to the view that phenomenal consciousness, which is the phenomenal qualities and structures that constitute the experience of dynamic objects as well as the subject of these experiences, all appear out of factors devoid of the *phenomenal* qualities and structures that make these distinctive features what they are. But without these phenomenal qualities and the structures in which they are embedded, the factors in question would be inadequate to the task of constituting conscious experience. We would need to posit brute emergence or brute causation in order for conscious experience to arise. This is why any view that considers a stream of conscious experience to arise from non-conscious factors is committed to appealing to brute emergence or causation. A view that appeals to these brute occurrences renders the world unintelligible, which is why a view that seeks the origins of a stream of consciousness in non-conscious factors presents the world as an unintelligible one in which no view or theory can be relied upon because factors could appear from anywhere at any time.

Therefore, we are much better off taking the view that an instance of conscious experience is preceded by a prior instance of conscious experience and that this stream of instances is unbroken. This is why physical birth cannot be the point at which conscious experience brutally emerges from non-conscious factors nor can bodily death be the point at which the stream of phenomenal

consciousness brutally transforms into completely different non-conscious factors. But this does not mean that phenomenal consciousness is separate from the physical factors that constitute the body. The simplest way to account for interactions between mental and physical factors is to assume that phenomenally conscious events and physical events are mutually conditioning and responsive to one another.

Insofar as we accept that phenomenally conscious processes and physical processes are mutually conditioning, there are a variety of ways in which a stream of consciousness might operate after bodily death. By considering the intense desires that are sedimented within the deep structure of phenomenal consciousness, whilst also considering the mutually conditioning relationship between this deep structure and physical reality, one can get a sense of how our physical world might still be an available object of attention as well as influence for a post-mortem instance of phenomenal consciousness.

With the overall argument concluded, there are a variety of questions that one could go on to investigate. For example, we might wonder precisely which regions of the physical universe a post-mortem consciousness would illuminate as well as if and how it might move through it. Within Buddhist philosophical systems it is generally assumed that craving and other mental factors embedded within the structure of consciousness will drive an ordinary mind-stream towards an appropriate newly developing body.

As to how the mind-stream gets to this new body, there are a range of options that can be plotted on a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum we might envision what we could call an “analogue” approach to rebirth in which a stream of disembodied conscious events arises in different physical locations at different times, seeking a suitable embodiment. Within the north Indian schools of Buddhism, something like this was taken to occur. However, in the “between state” a being was considered to have a “subtle” body, which enabled it to travel through physical space and even experience the world in a somewhat sensory manner. I describe this approach to rebirth as *analogue* insofar as there is a

steady progression from the place of death to the place of conception or birth.[1] This contrasts with the "digital" approach to rebirth in which there is no between state and the stream of conscious events ceases to arise in the physical location of the dead body and immediately arises in the location of the newly developing body. This is how rebirth operates according to the Theravāda Buddhist tradition.[2] Needless to say, more could be said on this topic.

Another possible avenue of investigation is the question of whether there are ways in which traditional Buddhist cosmology and the belief in rebirth might influence or augment the practice of mindfulness. It is certainly interesting to consider whether one's metaphysical and cosmological perspective has a serious impact when practising something as simple as mindfulness of breathing. This thesis has argued that mindfulness can be understood as the intrinsic capacity for consciousness to retain and embed past impressions, thoughts and attitudes. Given this, we might wonder whether an individual's practice of mindfulness might be shaped by their background assumptions and attitudes in ways that are not obvious to them.

We can follow this thought a little way by considering an example. When practising mindfulness of the breath our attention is placed on the sensations of the breath. Every time we recognise that our attention has wavered and we have become distracted we recall that we are practising mindfulness of the breath. Embedded within our recollection of the practice are deeper, implicit understandings. This is well illustrated in a passage from Rupert Gethin's essay 'On some definitions of mindfulness':

> [I]n the specific context in which the practice of mindfulness is envisaged by ancient Buddhist texts, in remembering that one should remember the breath, one is remembering that one should be doing a meditation practice; in remembering that one should be doing a meditation practice, one is remembering that one is a Buddhist monk; in remembering that one is a Buddhist monk, one is

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[1] See Robert Kritzer, 'Rūpa and Antarābhava', in *Journal of Indian Philosophy,* pp.235-272, Vol. 28, 2000.

[2] Ibid.

> remembering that one should be trying to root out greed, hatred and delusion. Conversely, in forgetting the breath, one is forgetting that one is doing a meditation practice; in forgetting that one is doing a meditation practice, one is forgetting that one is a Buddhist monk; in forgetting that one is a Buddhist monk one is forgetting that one is trying to root out greed, hatred and delusion. This seems to me to make sense of such traditional Buddhist meditations as recollection (anussati) of the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, which the texts themselves seem keen to include within the broad framework of mindfulness practice.[3]

This passage highlights the implicit understandings that are embedded within any explicit practice. It illustrates how an apparently simple practice such as mindfulness of the breath may in fact be a complex process involving layers of embedded thoughts, experiences, and intentions. Given the backward dependence of present impressions on those past impressions embedded within them, it follows that any conscious experience has a host of deeper features embedded within it. The depth and complexity of embedded impressions is such that each feature of conscious experience is inextricably linked with the others.

It is illuminating to consider this idea when we approach attempts to separate Buddhist practices such as mindfulness from Buddhist philosophy and cosmology. There may be an assumption here that the practice has been made simpler by being secularised. But mindfulness practice is nothing if not a serious engagement with consciousness. And if this project has done anything, it has hopefully made clear that consciousness is anything but simple. In trying to simplify the framework in which mindfulness is practised, secular approaches might in fact be replacing a Buddhist framework with one that is inadequate to the task of taking the depth and history of the practitioner's potentially beginningless mind-stream seriously.

When engaging in mindfulness within a secular context, a practitioner would do well to question whether the traditional Buddhist framework has been replaced

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[3] Rupert Gethin, 'On some definitions of mindfulness', *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1, May 2011, p.270.

with something that has the depth, richness, and sophistication required to deal appropriately with the sheer depth and complexity of their consciousness. This consciousness may well have a beginningless history and an inconceivably long future. My hope is that this line of questioning is taken that much more seriously in the light of the arguments that have been presented.

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